

**Factors Influencing Curriculum in Elementary Self-Contained Special  
Education Classrooms**

by

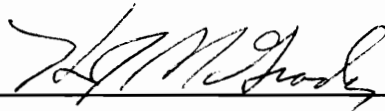
Michael Richard Marcela

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

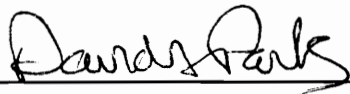
IN

ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

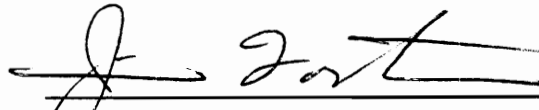
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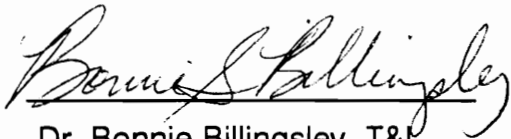
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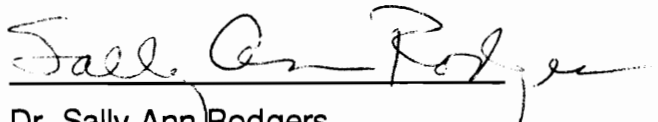
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**Key words:** Curriculum, Teacher Decision-Making, Self-Contained, EMH

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**FACTORS INFLUENCING CURRICULUM  
IN  
ELEMENTARY SELF-CONTAINED SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOMS**

**by**

**Michael Richard Marcela**

**Dr. Harold McGrady, Chairman**

**Administration and Supervision of Special Education**

**(ABSTRACT)**

In regular education classrooms, curriculum is prescribed by a state or local education agency. In special education programs such as inclusion or resource models, curriculum may be dictated by the regular education curriculum or by categorically-defined student learning needs. In the self-contained special education classroom, curriculum development is left to the discretion of the teacher. The classroom curriculum in such settings may be the result of numerous teacher decisions about curriculum. These decisions may be influenced by student, teacher, and contextual characteristics which impact the teacher's decision-making about development and implementation of the curriculum.

Subjects were four teachers of self-contained special education classrooms serving predominately students with educable mental retardation. Three classrooms were observed, one in each of three small school districts in North Carolina. Each class was observed for four days over an eight-week period. Teachers were interviewed on each day of observation. Students, the school principal, and the Exceptional Children Program Administrator were interviewed once. Reviews of student confidential records were conducted.

Within-site and cross-site analyses were conducted on the data. The curriculum in self-contained special education classrooms was described.

Student characteristics found to influence teacher decision-making in all sites were student achievement level and content of the IEP. Influential teacher characteristics common to all sites were perceptions of student abilities, needs, and interests; previous teaching experience; and the teacher's professional preparation program. Contextual characteristics present in all sites were the reference to the state curriculum, curriculum materials, and mainstreaming.

Student, teacher, and contextual characteristics combined to create the teachers' decision-making schema toward both the IEP and the curriculum. Several characteristics, including the teacher's decision-making schema, were found to also have a direct influence on the curriculum. A theoretical model specific to special education was created to explain the role of student, teacher, and contextual characteristics and the teachers' decision-making schema in both IEP and curriculum development and implementation..

## Dedication

To my strongest supporter, my harshest critic, a slave-driver when necessary,  
my best friend, and my wife,

**Marshalene H. Marcela**

You've sacrificed your time, money, your own desires and luxuries over the years  
so that this project can come to fruition.

I could not and would not have been able to it without you.

Over the upcoming years, may I be able to repay to you all that you have given  
for me.

I continually "...Promise Forever to Whisper Your Name"

## Acknowledgements

First I must acknowledge the contributions and support of my dissertation committee. I am indebted to Dr. Harold McGrady, my committee chair, who "adopted" me as his student following the death of Dr. Phil Jones and gave considerable time, understanding and assistance to get me through this past year. Dr. Dave Parks was of great assistance in defining the study and encouraging me to think qualitatively. Dr. Jimmie Fortune was instrumental in assisting in creating a manageable research methodology and I am forever grateful for the researcher commentary. Dr. Bonnie Billingsley first introduced me to the study of special education curriculum and provided for interesting discussions about the separation of curriculum and instruction. Dr. Sally Ann Rodgers was there to encourage me when I began my doctoral study and I was glad to have her assistance and suggestions throughout the study and at my program's end.

I must also thank all my friends and colleagues at B.H. Tharrington Elementary School in Mt. Airy, N.C. Aleathia, Sharon H., Liesa, Kathy C., Sherri B., Vera, and Byron were a continual source of laughs and friendship. Also, I'll never forget the kindness, concern, friendship (and food) from my colleagues in the Kindergarten/First-grade pod. Sylvia, thanks for the ACC Tournament tickets! Melinda Comer of Mt. Airy was a continual support to me and my wife throughout this project.

Acknowledgement must also be given to my friends at "Vajanyatek". Kathy and Darlene kept me straight and "university-approved". All the GA's in the EDSE department were wonderful, supportive friends. Special thanks to Jonathan, Mike, Kevin G. and Kevin B. for making residency a blast! I am indebted to Dr. Laura Goad for her sound advice and to Dr. Melinda Robinett for teaching me not only how to do things right, but also to do the right thing.

I am grateful for the support of my family. My mom, dad and brother, Paul, have been continually supportive of my efforts. My in-laws, the families of Linda and G.C. Senter, Brenda and Roland King, Judy and Roy Edwards, and Fred and Janice Honeycutt, have been wonderful, being quick to babysit or help out in a pinch, and to provide short-term loans coupled with long-term emotional support. Roy and Savada Honeycutt-you left this world far too soon. I am honored to have been your son-in-law.

My children, Braxton, and Rigney, have provided many hours of fun and relief throughout this project. Although they're too young to understand "daddy's schoolwork" and the concessions they have made for its completion, I promise to compensate them for their sacrifices over the upcoming years. I am overwhelmed by the blessing my boys have been to me.

I could not have completed this project had it not been for the support and encouragement of my wife, Marsha. Over the years, she has given so much time, money, and other sacrifices. This project has not been merely my dream, but our dream, and together we pulled it off!

Lastly, nothing is possible without the our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.. He provided financial and emotional support when there was none in sight. My faith has increased hundred-fold as I have been witness to His divine intervention assisting the completion of this project. May I be a "good manager" of this special gift I have received from God and use it for the good of others (1Peter 4:10)

And so the Great Adventure continues.....

Michael R. Marcela

April, 1996

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# CHAPTER 1

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROBLEM

### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter discusses issues concerning curriculum in regular and special education settings and introduces areas of concern. The research questions, assumptions, delimitations and definitions central to understanding the study are listed. Statements supporting the significance and justification for the study are also provided.

### I. PROBLEM STATEMENT

#### Curriculum in the Regular Classroom

The curriculum is the heart of any instructional program. Whether in regular or special education classrooms, issues of what is deemed important for students to learn are central components to a child's education. In regular education curriculum issues are often decided by state departments of education. The current trend is for these decisions to be made by local education agencies. Thus curriculum in the areas of language arts/communication skills, mathematics, science, social studies, health and physical education, music, art, and foreign language, and other subjects taught in elementary or secondary schools is developed, detailed, and prescribed from outside the classroom. Regular classroom teachers receive curriculum guides for specific curricular areas listing topics and objectives that are their responsibilities to teach at respective grade levels. The schools purchase textbooks recommended by the state. Such texts are presumed to contain the necessary information to teach the state or locally-

approved curriculum. Supplemental materials such as reading texts, workbooks and hands-on materials are sometimes purchased to assist in the implementation of the mandated curriculum at each grade level. Teachers may also be allowed to supplement these curriculum guides with their own personal materials. However, most of the decisions relative to curriculum planning and development are made by individuals detached from the school district, the school, the classroom, and the students themselves.

### Curriculum in Special Education

By contrast, special education teachers often do not have such curriculum decisions made for them. Due to the individualized approach inherent in special education, it is difficult to develop a statewide curriculum for students with learning disabilities, educable mental retardation, or emotional disturbance. Students with lower incidence handicapping conditions, such as autism, traumatic brain injury, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Fragile X syndrome or Down's Syndrome may have highly individualized learning needs. To address this situation, the federal government in P.L. 94-142, amended by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, created the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is a written plan stating the particular goals and objectives each student with disabilities is to meet on an annual basis. The IEP is designed to be each student's personal curriculum guide. As such, special education teachers have been granted significant authority to make curriculum planning decisions which can have profound influence on the educational life of the children in their classrooms.

### Curriculum Development in Inclusive and Resource Settings

Curriculum planning and development, albeit a highly complex and detailed process, may be less involved and all-consuming in inclusive classes or

resource programs for children with learning disabilities. In inclusive programs curriculum may be based on those regular curriculum objectives which would be appropriate for the student with special needs. Similarly, teachers' curriculum planning decisions may be less overwhelming in resource or pull-out programs. In such cases students typically receive special education targeted toward specific skills and particular curriculum areas (e.g., reading comprehension and mathematics). This planning may be aided by the fact that students are identified as having learning deficiencies in curriculum-specific disability areas: learning disabled in reading, written expression, mathematics; etc. Such curriculum-specific learning disabilities suggest and facilitate curriculum planning and development.

#### Curriculum in Self-Contained Special Education Settings

The self-contained special education classroom creates some complex issues with respect to curriculum. The self-contained classroom is often cross-categorical, requiring the teacher to address the educational needs of a number of vastly different disabilities. A cross-categorical self-contained class may serve children identified as educable mentally handicapped (EMH), behaviorally-emotionally handicapped (BEH), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), and learning disabled (LD), in the same classroom. Such disability categories are not curriculum specific, and each category may include a wide variety of educational needs. A self-contained class comprised of only EMH students may contain students with a wide range of IQ scores (usually 50-70), achievement levels, ages, grade levels, and behavioral manifestations. Curriculum planning and development can be very difficult for such a diverse classroom.

The special education teacher in a self-contained classroom must develop an appropriate curriculum format, decide which curriculum subject areas

should be taught, determine appropriate instructional levels, and implement appropriate instructional strategies. Without a state or locally developed curriculum, the teacher may be the main decision-maker in determining what students need to learn. In the self-contained classroom, the teacher is placed in the role of being not only an instructional specialist, but also of the curriculum developer.

### Influences on Curriculum Decision-Making in Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms

With such authority and autonomy delegated to the teacher of a self-contained special education class, curriculum may be influenced by a number of factors. Without the presence of mandated curriculum goals and objectives organized in a curriculum guide, the curriculum developed for students in a self-contained classroom may be influenced by factors such as: (a) student characteristics (e.g., IQ, adaptive behavior, time and nature of participation in the regular class, provision of related services); (b) teacher characteristics (e.g., background, experience or attitudes about mainstreaming/inclusion); (c) contextual characteristics (e.g., administrator support, funding for curriculum materials, or school district policy); and (d) teacher decision-making characteristics present in IEP development, instructional methodology, and lesson planning. Any of these factors may effect whether a teacher develops a curriculum that is in the best interest of the students.

Gallagher, Nuthall and Rosenshine (1970) state that it may be impossible to remove the effect of the individual teacher's decision-making from the curriculum. Although the same prepared curriculum can be applied to different classrooms, what and how the curriculum is taught will vary from class to class. The intervening variable is the individual teacher's curriculum decision-making. In addition to factors that may directly influence curriculum, the same factors may

either individually or in combination interact within the teacher and influence decision-making and the curriculum. Figure 1 presents the theoretical model of factors which could influence curriculum in self-contained special education classrooms.

## **II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The creation of a theoretical model to describe curriculum decision-making in self-contained special education classrooms raises several questions. These questions will provide additional information and test the validity of the model. This study addressed three primary research questions.

1. What is the observed curriculum in self-contained EMH special education classrooms?

2. What is the influence of student, teacher, and contextual characteristics on teacher decision-making about curriculum in self-contained EMH special education classrooms?

3. What is the influence of student, teacher, and contextual characteristics, and teacher decision-making about curriculum on the observed curriculum in self-contained special education classrooms?

## **III. ASSUMPTIONS**

In implementing the study it was first necessary to delineate the assumptions on which the research topic was based. Such assumptions helped to provide a framework, basis, or starting point for the study. Assumptions were both literature-based, resulting from the findings of previous work in the area of

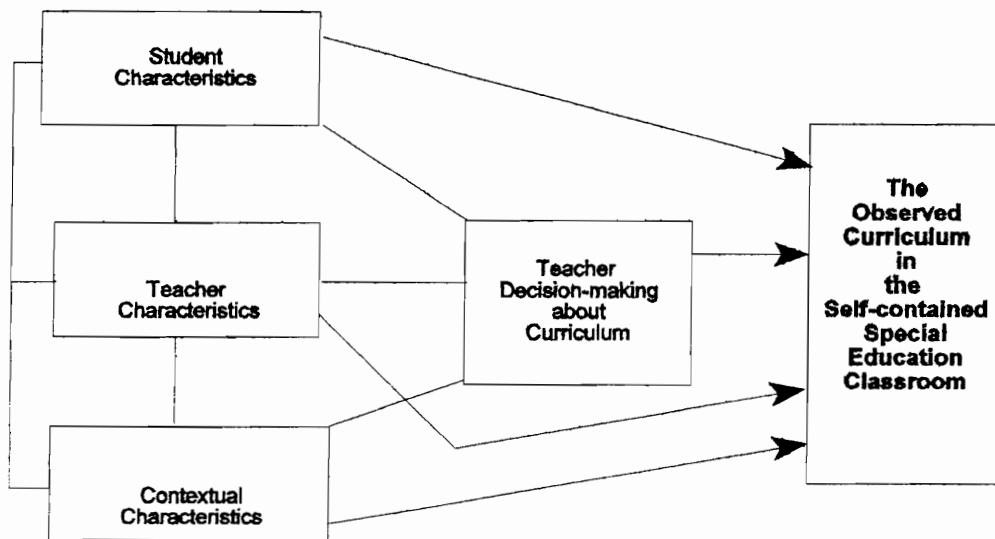


Figure 1. Theoretical model depicting factors that may influence the curriculum in self-contained special education classrooms.

**Note.** The independent variables of student, teacher, and contextual characteristics may directly influence the observed curriculum or may combine to create the intervening variable called teacher decision-making about curriculum which may influence the observed curriculum (dependent variable).



curriculum development for special education programs, or inherent in the structure and characteristics of the variables and components of the study. It is assumed that:

1. Students are placed in self-contained special education classrooms on the basis of several characteristics. IQ and adaptive behavior, as measured by an acceptable standardized individual assessment or test, are the main criteria for placement in special education programs serving students with educable mental retardation in North Carolina.

2. In order to meet the various instructional needs of special needs students, it is necessary for schools to provide a variety of curriculum options from the regular education curriculum or standard course of study to an independent living skills curriculum non-standard course of study. (McLaughlin, 1994, Bigge, 1988). (See Table 1)

3. Schools or school districts often lack a well-stated and specific curriculum policy for self-contained classrooms. Without such policy, curriculum development is often the primary responsibility of the individual teacher. This may result in an inappropriate curriculum, influenced by the teacher's own bias and speculations about student instructional needs and abilities. (Goldstein, 1986)

4. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) based on individual learning needs is developed for each child receiving special education. The IEP goals and objectives should be developed so as to reflect the curriculum in the self-contained classroom.

5. Curriculum refers to elements such as format, instructional methodology, materials, goals or objectives, planning, development, and areas of learning.

**Table 1**  
**List of Curriculum Options in Special Education**

Curriculum Format	Description
Regular education curriculum	Standard curriculum without adaptation.
Regular education curriculum with adaptations	Standard curriculum with modification in presentation, practice, and evaluation methods to meet individual student needs.
Parallel alternate curriculum	Uses objectives from standard curriculum, but structures the curriculum, instructional strategies, and evaluation methods to accommodate groups of students with special needs.
Remedial basic skills curriculum	Uses objectives similar to the standard curriculum, but focuses on identification and instruction in specific deficits in areas such as language arts, reading, and math.
Learning strategies curriculum	Emphasizes principles, rules, and techniques that enable students to learn, solve problems and function more independently in classroom and social settings.
Thematic unit curriculum	Organizes interdisciplinary content around themes or issues to address basic skills development.
Lower grade-level curriculum	Use of a lower-grade level curriculum including lower-grade level goals and objectives.
Social skills curriculum	Focuses on teaching appropriate behavior in various settings and situations by addressing identified deficits in basic communication skills, coping and survival skills.
Independent living skills curriculum	Unique curriculum with unique objectives emphasizing skill needs required for successful functioning in major life domains, environments, and activities.

Note. Adapted from: McLaughlin (1994); # 2-6,8,9; Bigge, (1988); #1,3,4,7.

6. Curriculum is the result of a series of decisions made by a committee or individual educator. Curriculum may be further modified by decisions of the individuals involved with implementation.

#### **IV. DELIMITATIONS**

It was necessary to restrain or restrict the focus of the study and to define an obtainable, workable sample. Without such restrictions, the study could have continued endlessly, collecting data from an extremely large sample or population. To avoid such difficulties in the study, a number of areas were identified for restraint or focus. Such delimitations for the proposed study included:

1. The independent variable of student characteristics was measured by a review of student records and psychological reports. Characteristics recorded and accompanying measurement units are listed below.

- a. Student IQ (mean, median and range).
- b. Mainstreaming (percentage of time per day spent in the regular classroom).
- c. Adaptive behavior (range of age-levels based on composite scores).
- d. IEP characteristics (e.g., mean number of long and short-term goals and objectives, areas of study, evaluation methods).
- e. Type and amount of related services.
- f. Present levels of achievement (Reading, math and writing levels from standardized tests).

2. The independent variable of teacher characteristics was measured through structured interviews and observation. Areas of focus are listed below.

- a. Educational background.
- b. Teaching experience.
- c. Teaching and subject area preferences.
- d. Views toward teaching, learning, and student needs.
- e. The teacher's IEP development process.

3. The independent variable of contextual characteristics was measured through structured interview and observation of teachers in self-contained classrooms. Specific areas of focus are listed below.

- a. Number of students on each class roll.
- b. Range of grade levels in the class.
- c. Written curriculum documents, policies and long range school or school system planning for curriculum.
- d. Administrative support and guidance.
- e. Curriculum materials.
- f. Teacher decision-making authority toward curriculum.
- g. Amount of funding available for curriculum materials.

4. The intervening variable of teacher decision-making was determined through interviews, classroom observation, and questions drawn from archival record reviews. Information was confined to decisions made relative to IEP development, curriculum development, and selection of materials.

5. The dependent variable of curriculum components was measured through observation of the curriculum as presented in self-contained classrooms in different academic subject areas. Curriculum components were assessed through structured interviews with teachers of self-contained classrooms. Curriculum observations focused on the areas listed below.

- a. Curriculum formats used.
- b. Source(s) of curriculum content.
- c. Teacher questioning level.
- d. Purpose of lessons.
- e. Curriculum materials.
- f. Topics of instruction.

6. The sample was limited to self-contained special education classrooms predominantly serving students identified as educable mentally handicapped (EMH). In all three classrooms, students with learning disabilities and trainable mental retardation were present.

7. Only self-contained special education classrooms at the elementary school level were included in the study. Elementary school level was determined to be where instruction throughout the school was provided in self-contained regular education classrooms and where all subject matter was taught to a similar group of students in one room, by one teacher, for a majority of the school day.

8. Schools involved in the study were restricted to public elementary schools from small school districts in Northwest North Carolina.

## **V. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

In the study, it was important to clearly delineate the terms involved. To evaluate the study, an understanding of the independent and dependent variables is necessary. Definitions of terms were research or literature-based, legally-based (from legislation or litigation), or are commonly understood as familiar terms in the field of education.

The terms listed below are defined operationally according to how they were used in the study.

1. **Adaptive Behavior**. The range of the chronological age score of the student's composite score on the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale or the AAMD Adaptive Behavior Scale.

2. **Contextual Characteristics**. Aspects of the self-contained special education class which are beyond the control of the teacher or student as observed by the researcher or reported by the teacher in interviews. These factors may be the result of administrators' decisions (e.g., policies, amount of funding for materials, or assignment of teaching assistants), federal or state regulations (e.g., class size) or a reflection of the philosophies or behaviors of individuals other than the teacher (e.g., curriculum support, or plans for inclusion).

3. **Curriculum**. The combination of format, subject areas of study, sources of content, materials, lesson plans, evaluation methods, and IEP goal and objectives which together comprise what material is selected to be taught to self-contained EMH students. Curriculum was measured through observation of the classroom and through interview and record reviews.

4. Curriculum Content Source. The variety of sources that teachers refer to in deciding which subject areas and topics to study, learning activities, and content scope and sequence. These sources were determined through observation, record review and interviews.

5. Curriculum Format. The variety of approaches which may be used in a self-contained classroom to teach necessary content while attempting to meet individual student learning needs. Curriculum format was determined through observation and teacher interviews.

6. Curriculum Support. The amount of input, guidance or review provided by individuals outside of the self-contained classroom (e.g., curriculum committee, the department chairperson, other special and/or regular education teachers, the building principal(s), the special education director or supervisor, the curriculum coordinator, the superintendent, advocacy or consulting groups, or parents). Amount of curriculum support was determined through teacher interviews.

7. Intelligence Quotient (IQ). The mean, median and range of scores obtained from a standardized, individual test such as the WISC-R (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised).

8. Self-contained Special Education Classroom. An educational placement delineated on the student's IEP where identified students spend a majority of the school day, (60% of the day in North Carolina) in one classroom, with limited interaction with non-disabled peers in a mainstream or inclusive environment.

9. Student Characteristics. Characteristics such as IQ, adaptive behavior level, instructional level and needs as stated on the IEP, required related services, and amount of mainstreaming. Student characteristics were measured through archival record review, observation, and teacher interviews.

10. Teacher Characteristics. Characteristics such as education background and teaching experience, focus of the teacher's preparation program, practices, views or attitudes. Teacher characteristics were measured through teacher interviews.

11. Teacher Decision-making. Decisions made by the teacher relative to curriculum content, instructional strategies, and materials. Teacher decisions about curriculum were measured through teacher interviews.

## VI. SIGNIFICANCE AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

### Trends and Legal Issues in Special Education

Recent litigation and current trends in special education suggest examination of the effectiveness of self-contained programs. Court decisions such as Sacramento City Unified School District v. Holland, Oberti v. Clementon School District, and Greer v. Rome City School District have called for placement in the regular classroom for students historically served in self-contained programs. Such rulings have cited the differences between curriculum in the regular class and self-contained classroom.

A student's IQ score is a component of the decision to place a student in a self-contained classroom. Recent litigation disclosed that IQ scores have been used to create generalizations about children. (Chrin, OSERS, 1992) Such generalizations have been used to unilaterally place children into certain programs. Self-contained programs traditionally consist of children with similar characteristics such as adaptive behavior levels and IQ. It is possible that the grouping of children with similar characteristics could lead teachers to make decisions concerning curriculum based solely on standardized test results, not with the best interests of the child in mind.



## Negative Aspects of the Self-Contained Special Education

### Classroom

Schools are required to provide a continuum of services for students with special needs. Deno (1973) developed a commonly used "Cascade of Special Education Services" model listing eight instructional settings for students with special needs. This model, which has become a well accepted paradigm for special education, suggested that students should move from more restrictive to less restrictive settings over time. Gartner and Lipsky (1987) and Patton, Cronin, Polloway, Hutchinson and Robinson (1989) found that students placed in more restrictive settings tend to remain in those settings. The curriculum present in self-contained classrooms may be significantly different from that of less restrictive settings, thereby encouraging separation from the regular class.

### Curriculum Support and Decision-Making

Curriculum support and development has been a "fuzzy" area in special education (O'Neil, 1988). Curriculum varies from adaptation of the regular education curriculum to separate, unique curriculum for students with special needs. Although individual assessment and evaluation provide educators with the deficiencies and learning needs of students, it is often difficult to decide what the student with mild or moderate disabilities needs to learn or how to organize content and skill areas for instruction. Additionally, curriculum development is often the responsibility of the special education teacher with little support or assistance from administrators, supervisors or other professionals. It could be useful to identify the predominant factors contributing to the curriculum decision-making process in self-contained special education classrooms.

### Contributions of the Study.

The study adds to the current research in the area of curriculum development, specifically the influence of student, teacher, and contextual characteristics on curriculum and curriculum decision-making. It adds to the knowledge of processes and practices which occur in self-contained special education classes. The study provides a description of curriculum in self-contained classrooms. Lastly, the study promotes a better understanding of many aspects of the self-contained classroom especially and the difficult decisions and tasks encountered by special education teachers in such settings.

### VII. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter compared curriculum in regular and special education classrooms, and highlighted difficulties in curriculum development in self-contained special education classrooms. The role of the teacher as decision-maker in curriculum development was discussed. A theoretical model describing the influence of student, teacher, and contextual characteristics on teacher decision-making and the combined influence of all these characteristics on the curriculum was presented. Research questions were stated. Assumptions on which the study was based, delimitations restricting the focus of the study and definitions of terms used in the study were delineated. A statement of the significance and justification for the study was included. Chapter Two consists of a review of the literature in the areas of special education curriculum and teacher decision-making about curriculum.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter will provide various definitions of and approaches to curriculum, a description of what is believed to be the appropriate curriculum for educable mentally handicapped students, an overview of the current system of curriculum development in special education, a current court ruling that discusses curriculum in special education, and the role of the IEP in curriculum development. Theoretical bases and research findings in the field of teacher decision-making toward curriculum will also be discussed. Lastly, the many areas which help shape curriculum (e.g., teacher attitudes, student characteristics, available materials) will be reviewed.

#### I. HISTORICAL DEFINITIONS OF CURRICULUM

There is a wide spectrum of definitions of curriculum. The range of definitions fall between two philosophical orientations. The proponents of the conservative orientation see curriculum as something intended. Supporters of this approach describe the curriculum in terms of written plans, a course of study, or predetermined learning outcomes. Individuals such as Tanner and Tanner (1980), Taba (1962), Phenix (1962) and Olivia (1982) are some main advocates of this traditional approach. The opposite end of the spectrum of definitions perceive curriculum as being something actualized. Curriculum may be the sum of both positive and negative experiences of an individual. Brubaker (1982), Dewey (1902), Caswell and Campbell (1935) and Bobbitt (1918) espouse the broad, experiential orientation in defining curriculum. All other definitions of curriculum fall between these two approaches and are dependent on particular

beliefs of what students should learn, how they should learn it and the role of the school in the student's learning.

### The Curriculum as Something Intended Orientation

The conservative orientation emphasizes the organization of knowledge from various disciplines into objectives which all students should learn. Content is of utmost importance. Phenix (1962) stated that "the curriculum should consist entirely of knowledge which comes from the disciplines" (p. 64) and "curriculum is the organized pattern of the school's educational program and describes the subject matter of instruction, the method of instruction and the order of instruction-the what, how and when." (Phenix, 1958). Olivia (1982) continued this traditional view by describing curriculum as " a plan or program for all the experiences which the learner encounters under the direction of the school" (p. 10). Other curriculum writers maintain the traditional approach while allowing for the influence of the child's experience. Beauchamp (1964) and Saylor and Alexander (1966) see curriculum as encompassing all the learning experiences provided by the school.

### The Curriculum as Something to be Actualized Orientation

The experiential orientation defines curriculum in the broadest sense as "what a person experiences in a setting" (Brubaker, 1982). This approach tends to see curriculum not as hard and fast subjects or topics to teach the child, but rather as a sum of the experiences of the child. Dewey, in his work, The Child and the Curriculum (1902) describes the process called continuous reconstruction where the curriculum develops "from the child's experience out into areas represented by the organized bodies of truth we call studies." Bobbitt (1918) developed a definition supporting the curriculum as an actualizing approach, stating that the child's curriculum may be "the entire range of

experiences, both undirected and directed, concerned in unfolding the abilities of the individual" (p.34).

### Summarizing the Definition of Curriculum

Goodlad et al. (1979) suggest that it is impossible to develop one all-encompassing "correct" definition of curriculum. In an effort to bring together the opposing philosophical orientations and various definitions, Klein (1979) organized the study of curriculum into three sub-types: the formal curriculum mandated by federal, state or local educational authorities, the operational curriculum being implemented at any given moment, and the curriculum experienced by the students themselves. Van Tassel-Baska et al. (1989) denote a similar breakdown of curriculum into the explicit (what is intended), the delivered (what is taught) and the received (what is learned). Neither of these classes or subtypes of curriculum is on its own an adequate definition of curriculum but must be considered as a whole.

## II. CURRICULUM IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

### Orientations for Curriculum Development in Special Education

Curriculum in special education is developed between two main orientations. The curriculum for students with special needs is often based on either the standard curriculum for regular education, a functional approach, or a combination of the two orientations. (McLaughlin, 1994). A student with a mild disability may be able to follow and participate in the regular classroom course of study with appropriate modifications in presentation, assignments, or evaluations. A student with a more significant disability may require a separate, more functional orientation. The functional orientation to curriculum in special education includes four areas which may be used in combination with the regular

course of study or with each other. The four areas include: basic skill curriculum to remediate deficient academic skills; social skill and life adjustment curriculum- focusing on personal interrelationships, and appropriate behavioral skills; maintenance curriculum- focusing on the development of learning strategies to facilitate learning, and an adult outcome curriculum- centered on vocational, and independent living skills (Clark, 1994, Polloway, Patton, Epstein and Smith, 1989). Due to the individualized nature of special education and the variety of learning needs within a classroom, a standard course of study orientation may co-exist with any of the four functional curriculum orientations across curriculum areas and learning activities (McLaughlin, 1994). Similarly the curriculum orientations used may differ according to educational setting with the basic skill, social skill, and adult outcome approaches more prevalent in more restrictive settings and maintenance and standard course of study orientations present in resource and inclusive settings (Polloway et al. 1989).

### Curriculum Development in Self-Contained Classroom Settings

With such a variety of options, curriculum development in special education can be a complex task. Special educators in self-contained settings are faced with attempting to meet student needs in several content areas while preparing students for participation in the regular classroom. In addition to typical curriculum areas such as science and social studies, students with special needs require intensive instruction in areas such as reading, writing and mathematics. In addition, social skill instruction is often required as well to improve student behavior and personal relationship skills (O'Neill, 1988). The special education teacher in a self-contained classroom is expected to teach all these areas across several different grade levels in the same room simultaneously. Often as teachers concentrate on developing skill areas in

language arts and mathematics, students fail to receive the necessary instruction in social studies and science (O'Neill, 1988).

### Curriculum and the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

#### Emphasis on the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

contributes to the complications faced by special education professionals when developing appropriate curriculum. McLaughlin (1994) states that the importance placed on the IEP and "emphasis on individualization may lead educators to lose sight of the broader curriculum context"(p. 151). The IEP can be used to remove the constraints of a teacher to follow a standard curriculum as is followed in the regular classroom (O'Neill, 1988). Proponents of the IEP see it as the student's personal curriculum and as such believe the standard course of study too narrow, inappropriate and unnecessary to use with students with special needs (Sands, Adams & Stout, 1995). As such, the IEP provides the special education teacher with great autonomy with regard to curriculum development.

Others see the IEP as a basis for determining student needs and as a tool for placing the student with special needs into the standard curriculum. (Sands, et al. 1995). The function of the IEP in this view is to delineate necessary accommodations and modifications to the regular classroom curriculum and instruction (Falvey, Coots, Bishop & Grenot-Scheyer, 1989). Composed of "curriculum targets" deemed important for the student with special needs to learn, the IEP must be transformed into curriculum content, units and lesson plans to be implemented in the classroom over a certain amount of time. (McLaughlin, 1994).

### Consequences of Neglecting the Area of Curriculum Development

Polloway et al. (1989) state that curriculum development is the most critical programming consideration for students with disabilities. The

compliance requirements of IDEA often require teachers and school districts to neglect curriculum in favor of assuring procedural conformity. Ignoring curriculum development from a district-wide perspective leaves the responsibility for curriculum development to the special education teacher. Goldstein (1986) concludes that the absence of curriculum support may lead to haphazard curriculum development. Without assistance, teachers develop programs lacking direction or an objective basis for their decisions about curriculum.

### Legal Issues Concerning Curriculum in Special Education

Historically, the courts have left issues concerning curriculum for students with special needs to the expertise of special education teachers. In the *Oberti v. Clementon School District* case, issues relative to least restrictive environment, inclusion, and appropriate curriculum for a moderately handicapped student were addressed. The Kindergarten student had Down Syndrome and severe behavioral problems. The school district recommended a self-contained classroom using a functional orientation with a basic skills curriculum. The court called for an inclusive placement in a regular classroom using a standard course of study orientation and a parallel curriculum approach. This decision implies that different curriculum exists in segregated learning environments and that curriculum in a segregated environment may be inappropriate.

## III. CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS WITH EDUCABLE MENTAL RETARDATION.

### Recommended Content of the Curriculum

Due to variations in student learning abilities and other characteristics within a self-contained classroom serving students with educable mental retardation, it is often difficult to follow a standard course of study or to



adhere to one particular type of curriculum. It is commonly believed that any curriculum for a self-contained class serving students with educable mental retardation should focus on the long-term goal to teach students the necessary skills and attitudes that they will need to successfully live and work in society (MacMillan, 1982).

The organization of the curriculum across the grade span for students with educable mental retardation may be similar to that provided to non-handicapped students. At the elementary level, emphasis should be on intensive basic skill development in areas such as reading, writing, language, arithmetic, science, aesthetics (music, art), physical education, and other areas related to personal, social, and pre-vocational competence (Kirk and Gallagher, 1983). As the student moves from the elementary to middle and finally to the high school level, the emphasis of the curriculum should shift to intensive instruction in vocational, daily living skills, and social skill competence, with attention focused on maintaining academic skills (Kirk and Gallagher, 1983).

#### Various Approaches to EMH Curriculum

Kirk and Johnson (1951) organized the curriculum for students with educable mental retardation into three general areas of skill development: occupational adequacy, social competence, and personal adequacy. Skills necessary for occupational adequacy are those that assist the individual to be self-supportive such as being prompt, getting along with others, maintaining good health, and managing money. Skills required for establishing a home, raising children, respecting others, and living within the community as an adult comprise the area of social competence. The area of personal adequacy refers to the development of positive self-esteem, developing peer friendships, and promoting emotional well-being.

Heiss and Mischio (1972) state that a successful method of organizing the curriculum for students with educable mental retardation may be the unit or integrated curriculum approach. In this method, the instruction in the necessary skill areas such as reading, arithmetic, writing, and spelling centers around a topic of interest to the students, usually from the science or social studies field.

Goldstein (1974) developed a comprehensive curriculum for students with educable mental retardation called the Social Learning Approach. This approach organized and sequenced content and skill instruction in reading, arithmetic, and writing around the psychological, physical, and social needs of the students. Psychological needs include areas such as developing self-respect and mastery. Physical needs may include sensory stimulation and physical maintenance. Social needs may include dependence on others, developing independence, and mobility. The curriculum is organized through the use of varying levels of inductive questions designed to draw information from within the student. Levels of questions include: labeling, detailing, inferring, predicting, and generalizing.

When developing or implementing curriculum for students with educable mental retardation, it is important to stress the application of all skill instruction to practical living and vocational situations. Similarly, it is of utmost importance to relate the curriculum to the individual student's community and personal situation in which the skills will most likely be put to use when the student reaches adulthood (Kirk and Gallagher, 1973).

## IV. CURRICULUM AND TEACHER DECISION-MAKING

### Background of the Field of Decision-Making About Curriculum

In order for curriculum to be developed and implemented, several major decisions about education, the school and the classroom must be addressed. Tyler (1949) developed four fundamental questions which should be answered prior to curriculum development:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

(Tyler, 1949, p.1)

Abbreviated, these questions address decisions related to purpose, decisions related to student experiences, decisions related to organization, and decisions related to evaluation.

Goodlad et al. (1979) further explored the levels of decision-making within educational institutions. They divided curriculum decision-making into three distinct areas: societal, institutional, and instructional. Societal curriculum decisions are those that are made by individuals or agencies far removed from the student who will receive the curriculum. These decisions may be made by state or local school boards, state departments of education, and federal agencies concerned with educational policy or procedures. Institutional

curriculum decisions are made by those within a school system and may include central office personnel, system-wide curriculum committees, and individual school principals or faculties. These individuals work within the framework provided by the societal level of curriculum decisions to further define the proposed curriculum for the student. Instructional curriculum decisions are those made closest to the point of service by the individual teacher responsible for the actual instruction of the student.

Implicit in the Goodlad model of curriculum decision-making are three basic assumptions. The first assumption is that all three decision-making levels have the same interest, the needs of the student, at the heart of their decisions. Secondly, it is assumed that all three levels make decisions cooperatively. The societal level decisions can be implemented at the institutional level and that the institutional level decisions can be implemented at the instructional level. Lastly, there is an assumption of consent, compliance, and passivity at all levels below the societal. School systems will accept the societal decisions, schools will support and work within these decisions, teachers will implement the decisions in their classrooms, and students will agree with what is decided to be important for them to learn.

#### Instructional Level Decision-making

English (1978) discussed curriculum in terms of decision-making space. In ensuring for a quality curriculum, it is necessary for curriculum developers to adequately address specific details about the curriculum. Those details left unspecified at a higher level will fall to those at lower levels to decide. Hence, teachers (instructional level) may have a significant amount of decision-making space.

A particular curriculum may identify "the sequence of events or steps of introduction, it may specify the pace to be utilized the teaching methods to be

used and related materials" (English, 1978, p. 22). Yet because of the interactive process (the translation of the written curriculum into practice by the classroom teacher) the curriculum experienced by the student may vary considerably from the curriculum intended by the decision-makers at the societal or institutional levels.

Joseph Schwab (1960) discussed the role of the teacher as an influence on the curriculum. Schwab developed the term "curriculum deliberation" and the study of the "practical" in curriculum. Deliberation refers to the process used by teachers to consider options and determine appropriate action when implementing curriculum (Johnston, 1993). The study of the practical in curriculum is the study of daily and minute-by-minute curriculum decisions made by teachers (Jackson, 1992). Decisions made by teachers concerning the implementation of the curriculum are based on a number of factors and lead to individualized interpretations of the intended curriculum.

Translation of the intended curriculum occurs daily and is due to the fact that teachers act as mediators of curriculum. Teachers are curriculum agents who alter the intended curriculum by infusing their personal beliefs, principles, relationships, knowledge, and interests as they plan and implement a particular curriculum into their classroom (Parker and McDaniel, 1992). Two aspects of mediation are practical knowledge and hermeneutics. Practical knowledge refers to the "bag of tricks" that teachers use on a daily basis to solve the problems in curricular planning and implementation that occur on a daily basis. Walker (1971) refers to practical knowledge in terms of a "platform"; an idea of what is and a vision of what ought to be which guides the curriculum developer (teacher) in determining what he should do to realize his vision. Hermeneutics is the study of understanding and refers to the process a teacher may undergo when selecting a particular strategy or behavior to use, when and with which students (Ross, Cornett, and McCutcheon, 1992). Mediation of the curriculum is influenced by

school structures, the individual teacher's practice, and "tools". Mediation is informal instead of formal and is a combination of teachers' practical knowledge and the process of making decisions about particular teaching strategies from their repertoire of teaching behaviors (Parker and McDaniel, 1992).

### Curriculum Decisions Made by the Individual Teacher

Even with the use of a state-mandated standard course of study or detailed curriculum guides, a teacher in the regular education classroom makes a number of significant curriculum decisions on a daily basis. At the heart of curriculum decisions is the initial decision of the teacher to either accept, modify, resist, or openly reject curriculum decisions made at higher levels (Klein, 1979). If the teacher accepts the curriculum as intended, there remain a number of decisions about the curriculum which are the responsibility of the individual teacher. These include choices about what to teach, when to teach it, how much time to spend on each topic, and how to evaluate pupil progress (Pape, 1993). Other areas of decision-making include the organization of information (central concepts, skills and values) within a topic, the role of the student in curriculum planning and implementation, and what materials to use in teaching a topic (Klein, 1979). It is the teacher who makes decisions about pacing, content, the degree of repetition required, and whether to terminate or adjust a particular sequence of instruction based upon cues provided by the students through facial expressions, verbal responses, achievement, behavior, and evaluations (English, 1978).

## V. THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHER DECISION-MAKING ON CURRICULUM

There may be any number of factors which could influence the decisions that teachers make when developing and implementing curriculum. Even the most detailed, commercially-produced or institutionally-created curriculum must

be modified in some way by the teacher for instruction to a particular class. Teachers have their own beliefs, practices and experiences which individualize each decision they make. Decisions may be further influenced by student characteristics as well as by the characteristics of their particular teaching environment.

### Influences of Student Characteristics

There is limited information on the influence of student characteristics on curriculum decision-making. Johnston (1993) found in her case study of a elementary school teacher that the age of the student's in her class was a main determinant in the development of a social studies curriculum. The classroom teacher attempted to match the content of the curriculum with the experiences of the seven and eight-year old children in her class. Other student characteristics may be the student's educational needs and personal backgrounds (Johnston, 1993).

Herbert Kohl (1967), based the curriculum in his classrooms on the lived situations of the children. In his approach, all curriculum decisions were made based on the personal interests of the individual child. Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1958) used a similar approach in which the characteristics of the students themselves were the basis for the classroom curriculum. Ashton-Warner (1958) states that, "I am made of their thoughts, and their feelings. I am composed of sixty-odd different pieces of personality" (p. 22)

### Influences of Teacher Characteristics

The main focus of the curriculum deliberation literature is on the influence of teacher characteristics on teacher's decisions. Ferguson (1985) stated that the education of students with disabilities is often based on a teachers set of beliefs. Teacher characteristics fall into three main areas: the teacher's

personal beliefs about curriculum and teaching in general, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions about students and the teacher's personal teaching background and experience.

Teachers possess their own individual beliefs about education and the role of the teacher in the classroom. Johnston (1993) found that curriculum decisions may be based on the individual teacher personal views about teaching and the individual's image of herself as a teacher. Tobin and LeMaster (1992) state that teachers do what they do in classrooms because of their beliefs about what should be done and how students learn and refer to the use of metaphors, or self-descriptions of a teacher's role as key influences on curriculum decisions. Role perceptions play a part as teachers who saw themselves as "technical" implemented curriculum differently from those who visioned themselves as "constructivist" (Thornton, 1992).

Similarly, teacher's particular beliefs about the curriculum in general or about particular content areas influence their decisions. Teachers tend to have their own views and beliefs about what is the best curricular emphasis and approach for student with mild disabilities (O'Neill, 1988). Johnston (1993) found that teacher's attitudes toward curriculum content (i.e, "what is social studies?") shape curriculum development. Thornton (1992) states that teachers beliefs about what should be emphasized in the implementation of the curriculum (coverage of content versus depth of understanding) and personal concepts of curriculum content are significant influences on decision-making. Stodolsky (1988) concluded that subject matter or content plays a central role in explaining "why a curriculum looks they way it does."

Teacher attitudes, beliefs and perceptions toward the students they teach have been shown to be key influences on curriculum decision-making. Pape (1993) found that student teacher's curriculum decisions were based in part on their individual perspectives of what was good for pupils to learn. Brady,



Campbell and Nielson (1992) found that teachers know "best practices" to use with students with disabilities but tend to use teaching methods that are based on their beliefs about student's abilities when applying that knowledge. Often the decision to use a certain curriculum model is based primarily on the traditional group label of the disabled students involved (Polloway et al., 1989). Other teacher attitudes concerning students include teacher's attitudes toward children's probable futures, beliefs about what instructional strategies or approaches are best for students and beliefs about the role of the student in classroom learning (Johnston, 1993). Lastly, teacher's consideration of how and what students would be capable of learning play an important role in teacher's decisions about what and how to teach (Thornton, 1992)

Teacher experience and background are additional teacher characteristics which influence curriculum decision-making. White (1985) found that teachers base their curriculum decisions on personal beliefs and experiences with "what works" in their classroom. Teachers are most likely to teach subject matter and use teaching strategies that they have been successful with in the past (Thornton, 1992). The elementary school teacher profiled in Johnston (1993) drew on her own experiences and weighed the various types of activities and learning experiences with which she was familiar in making curriculum-instructional decisions.

The teacher-training preparation program has been determined to affect teacher curriculum decision-making. Pape (1993) found that the curriculum decisions made by student teachers led to the creation of a curriculum that was similar to that of their supervising teacher's. There is also considered to be a lack of adequate training in the area of curriculum development and in content subject areas for future special education teachers (Goldstein, 1986; McKenzie, 1991; Carlson, 1985). Many teachers learn appropriate curriculum development strategies while "on-the-job" (Sands, Adams & Stout, 1995). Teacher's

curriculum decision-making abilities may be hindered due to a lack of exposure to various approaches to curriculum or adequate training in curriculum development.

### Influences of Contextual Characteristics

Although teacher characteristics may play a significant role in teacher decisions about curriculum, the teacher does not operate in total isolation. Characteristics of the teaching environment such as availability and type of curriculum materials, presence of curriculum guides or requirements, and constraints imposed by administrators influence curriculum decisions yet are often beyond the control of the teacher. Teachers depend heavily on textbooks to assist them in making decisions concerning what material to teach (Thornton, 1992; Pape, 1993, and Klein, 1979). Similarly, the availability of supplemental materials can either enhance or hinder what aspects of a particular topic a teacher may decide to teach (Ross, Cornett and McCutcheon, 1992).

There appears to be little or no influence of a state or district-mandated curriculum guide on a teacher's decision-making. Although a district curriculum guide may be consulted to prevent the exclusion of important elements to teach, the same guide may be ignored when the teacher disagrees with what the guide mandates (Johnston, 1993). Although state curriculum goals are often viewed with skepticism and deemed unrealistic, teachers may refer to them out of fear of non-compliance with state or local regulations (Pape, 1993). Guidelines, criteria, and decisions made at the societal or institutional levels may influence teacher decision-making by acting as a constraint upon teachers' inclinations to use other approaches (Klein, 1979).

Administrative input may as well influence teacher decision-making. Working for a school principal that practices a "hands-off" approach to supervision of instruction and curriculum may give a teacher considerable leeway to make individual curriculum decisions (Johnston, 1993). Curriculum decisions

made by teachers in the absence of support or direction may be subject to individual bias about curriculum content and student learning priorities (Goldstein, 1986). A significant amount of administrator input or supervision may promote horizontal and vertical articulation of a state or district-mandated curriculum while limiting the decision-making space of the individual teacher (English, 1978).

## VI. SUMMARY

Although curriculum may be defined in any number of ways, it is obvious that curriculum is more than merely the state or locally-mandated written plan of objectives. The written plan is only a description of what the student should be knowledgeable about at the completion of public school. "The real curriculum is the bottom line, the thing that is or is not coordinated, articulated alive, repetitious by design or default or economical" (English, 1978, p. 26). Curriculum is what takes place in the classroom and is the result of a series of decisions made by the individual teacher and influenced by a number of characteristics. Curriculum may vary from class to class, be it in the regular classroom or in the self-contained special education classroom.

## VII. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the literature in the fields of curriculum development, special education curriculum, and curriculum decision-making. Various orientations to defining curriculum were discussed. Options for curriculum development in special education and preferred methods for organizing curriculum in self-contained special education classrooms were highlighted. The field of curriculum decision-making, the role of the teacher decisions in implementation of the curriculum and influences on teacher decision-making about curriculum were delineated. Chapter Three describes the research methodology used to address the research questions.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter discusses the research methodology utilized in the study. The methods and procedures for the selection of respondents, development of instrumentation and collection of data are delineated. A full description of the pilot study and changes made to the procedures is included. Details relative to data analysis and limitations of the study are listed.

### I. RESPONDENTS

#### Selection Criteria

Prior to subject selection, the researcher obtained permission from the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Division. Subjects for the study were four special education teachers from three elementary self-contained classrooms from three different small school systems in North Carolina. One classroom was served by two teachers. Only teachers of self-contained special education classrooms serving predominantly students with educable mental retardation were included. A small school system was defined as one with an Average Daily Membership (ADM) of 4,000-10,000 students with between seven and fifteen schools.

### II. INSTRUMENTATION

#### Variables to be Addressed in the Study

Data was collected through classroom observation, teacher interviews, and review of archival records. Data collection focused on five

general categories which were thought to influence curriculum in self-contained classrooms. These general categories comprised the independent, intervening, and dependent variables in the study. The variables were as follows:

Independent Variables:

1. Student characteristics (e.g., IQ, adaptive behavior, IEP);
2. Teacher characteristics (e.g., years experience, background, attitudes and beliefs);
3. Contextual characteristics (e.g., curriculum support, funding for materials, grade levels in the class);

Intervening Variable:

4. Teacher decision-making about curriculum;

Dependent Variable:

5. The observed curriculum (e.g., curriculum format, content sources, instructional methods, materials).

### III. PROCEDURE

#### Obtaining Permission to Conduct the Study

School districts were selected using a map of school districts in Northwest North Carolina, school district ADM, and facility data from the 1992-93 North Carolina Education Directory. The researcher contacted by letter (see Appendix A) school superintendents of three school districts to receive

permission to review records, conduct interviews, and observe the self-contained classroom. The researcher followed-up all letters with a telephone call to ascertain if permission was to be granted or denied. Permission was granted initially by only one of the first three identified districts. Referring to the North Carolina Education Directory, the researcher selected four additional school districts and mailed letters seeking permission to conduct the study. Two of the districts refused permission and two agreed to participate in the study. Permission was obtained from the three participating school districts by December 8, 1995.

School sites were selected through conversations between the researcher and the Exceptional Children Program Administrator (ECPA) in the participating school districts. Only elementary level classrooms serving predominately students with educable mental retardation were discussed. The researcher chose the classrooms based on the recommendation of the ECPA in each school system.

School principals and individual teachers were contacted by telephone to obtain their permission. The researcher then met with the principal and the teacher(s) within a week to address concerns and questions about the study and to arrange the first observation. Each teacher, principal and exceptional children's program director were asked to sign an informed consent form giving their permission for their participation in the study. Letters describing the study were sent home by the teacher to parents seeking permission to access and review confidential records. Letters were asked to be returned within a week.

## Data Collection Methods

### A. Classroom Observation

The researcher spent four days in each classroom over an eight-week time period, observing at least three different thirty to forty-five-minute

sessions covering different subject areas each day. Subject areas observed were reading, language arts and mathematics as well as others such as science, social studies, and health.

The information related to the independent variables of teacher characteristics and contextual characteristics, the intervening variable of teacher decision-making, and the dependent variable of the observed curriculum was obtained. Observations provided information about grade level range, subject areas and topics taught, curriculum format used, sources for the curriculum content, materials, lesson purpose, level of questioning, and mainstreaming activity. During observation, the researcher developed a list of questions regarding teacher decisions about the observed curriculum. These questions were posed to the teacher in interviews conducted at a later time.

#### B. Archival Record Review

The archival record reviews were conducted between observation sessions. The reviews were conducted using researcher-developed forms to record information from psychological reports and IEPs (see Appendix F). Information was obtained about the independent variable of student characteristics. Data such as IQ, achievement levels, and adaptive behavior scores was obtained from confidential student records. Mainstreaming information, areas and topics of study, and long and short-term objectives were obtained from review of IEPs. Curriculum materials, teacher lesson plans, student work examples, and testing materials were reviewed obtain information about the dependent variable: the observed curriculum.

### C. Teacher, Student and Administrator Interviews

A structured interview consisting of a preset question script (see Appendix G) pertaining to the independent variables of teacher and contextual characteristics was held with the classroom teacher at the end of the first day of observation. Subsequent interviews on the remaining three days focused on questions related to classroom observations. This was to obtain information about the intervening variable of teacher decision-making about curriculum and to further determine the dependent variable: the observed curriculum. All interviews were audio-taped.

Students were interviewed during one thirty-minute session, conducted at the end of the site visits. Interested parents gave written permission for students to be interviewed. Students also gave their individual permission to be interviewed. Questions were structured. They focused on topics of instructions and activities in which they had participated in during the previous months in the class. Interviews were audio-taped.

The school principal and Exceptional Children's Program Administrator were interviewed separately using a scripted set of questions (see Appendix I) during the last day of observation or on subsequent days. These interviews lasted no more than one hour. Interviews were conducted using structured questions and were audio-taped. The information from the administrator interviews helped to verify and support teacher responses as well as to provide insight into the independent variables of student, teacher and contextual characteristics.

### D. Review of the Case Study Site Report

Following the four days of observation, record review and interviews, the researcher summarized all information for each classroom into a



case study report. Each teacher received a copy of their respective report and was asked to make observations, clarifications, and suggestions concerning the reports' accuracy and conclusions. The researcher met with each teacher a fifth and final time to discuss any comments or concerns about the corrected case study report. Final revisions were made and copies of the case study report were sent to the school district superintendent, the Exceptional Children's Program Administrator, the school principal, and the teacher. A copy of the report was also sent to four parents of children involved in the study. These parents indicated on the Informed Consent Form sent home at the beginning of the study their desire to receive a copy of the final case study report.

#### IV. PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING THE PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted while awaiting permission from participating school districts. The pilot study involved one self-contained special education classrooms serving predominantly educable mentally handicapped students in a small school district in Northwest North Carolina. Written permission was obtained from the superintendent, as well as informed consent from all student's parents, participating teacher, and administrators. Observations, record reviews and interview procedures were conducted during three days in the classroom. The participating teacher in the pilot study had opportunity to provide feedback on the interview schedule observation procedures, and researcher style and behavior. A case study report of the pilot study classroom was prepared and given to the pilot study superintendent, Exceptional Children Program Administrator, principal, and teacher as well as to one parent of a student in the class.

#### Changes to Procedures or Instrumentation Due to the Pilot Study

Several changes were made to both the archival record review

instrument and the classroom observation instrument as a result of the pilot study. On the archival record review forms, the section originally developed to record Stanford-Binet IQ scores was deleted and replaced with a detailed section to record all reading, math and written language scores as well as sub-test scores from the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised Test of Achievement. The "Other IQ tests" section was deleted and replaced with a section for the researcher to record any type of testing such as visual-motor evaluations. The Adaptive Behavior Score section was modified to be able to clearly record the composite and sub-test scores for each student.

On the Classroom Observation Instrument, the column for "time" was expanded and the column for "notes" was decreased. The column for "topic decisions" was deleted and replaced by a column for "subject matter". This change allowed the researcher to list the many specific topics different students worked on in the course of one lesson. Several changes were made to the Observation Categories and Coding System forms. Under "lesson purpose", coding for "question/response" and "evaluate baseline or mastery" were included and the code for "other/none of the above" was deleted. The category for "topic change decisions" was omitted. Under the category, "curriculum materials", section one, "books and printed materials", the term "worksheets" was added to item "e", workbooks. Also item "d", student pictures, under section four, "flat graphics" was changed to "student-made materials".

Two questions were added on the structured interview schedule and one question was deleted. Items added were: "What was the focus of your teacher preparation program" and "How much of your own money do you spend on curriculum materials?". The item, "Describe a typical day in your classroom was deleted".

## V. DATA ANALYSIS

### Preparation of Case Study Summaries

Following collection, the researcher wrote a detailed synopsis of each classroom involved including summaries of all observations, interviews, and record reviews. Each participating teacher reviewed her summary and met with the researcher to clarify, discuss and make suggestions about the synopsis of their class.

### Collating Data using Meta-Matrices

The researcher reviewed data from all instruments and interview responses, and information across each factor that had been observed or recorded. Data was collated in tabular form (e.g., observation results per category, archival record information) through the use of an unordered meta-matrix (Miles & Huberman, 1984) to reduce and condense data into a manageable format. The unordered meta-matrix was the first step in reducing voluminous amounts of data. Data from each of three cases was collated in a series of specific matrices. Information was recorded on Matrix One delineating demographic information about the school system, school and class. IEP information was recorded in Matrix Two. The observed curriculum was described in Matrix Three, based on information gleaned from observations and interviews. Questions asked in interviews were broken down into type, number and focus of questions in Matrix Four. Information about student, teacher, and contextual characteristics were recorded on Matrices Five, Six and Seven. The last three matrices delineate the influence of the particular characteristics on both teacher decision-making and direct influence on the curriculum. (see Chapter Four) Conclusions drawn from matrices were described in narrative formats.

Using matrices from each case, the researcher identified similarities and patterns between the cases and any relationships between student, teacher, and contextual characteristics, teacher decision-making, and curriculum components. Similarities and differences among cases were collated in a series of five matrices. The cross-case analysis contained matrices describing student characteristics, IEP content, the observed curriculum, influences on teacher decision-making, and direct influences on the curriculum. (see Chapter Five) Similar responses across cases allowed the researcher to draw conclusions about any particular characteristic's influence on teacher decision-making and on the curriculum. Conclusions led to a revision of the original theoretical model. Suggestions for additional research were delineated.

## VI. LIMITATIONS

Conclusions drawn from the research are limited by a number of conditions. Such conditions resulted from components of the research design (e.g., respondents or instrumentation). These limitations may restrict generalizations from the findings. Limitations of the study are:

1. The small sample size (N=3) might hinder generalization to a larger population;
2. Use of a sample drawn exclusively from small school divisions could limit generalization to larger school divisions;
3. Because this was a qualitative study, observations and interactions between subjects and the researcher may have led to inaccurate or unconsciously biased results and conclusions.
4. Without the use of additional observers/researchers, the recorded observations and findings are only what the lone researcher saw or recorded;

5. Information obtained may be incomplete or not fully representative of the actual curriculum in the classroom due to the small number of observations conducted in a relatively short time-frame.

## VII. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter described the methods used in conducting the study. Respondents, instrumentation, procedures, and limitations of the study were discussed. Data analysis procedures were outlined. The pilot study procedures and subsequent changes to record review, observation instruments, and interview questions were delineated. Chapter Four discusses results and contains matrices described in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presents the results obtained from interviews, observations, and record reviews for each school site. The chapter is composed of three case study reports. Each site report provides demographic information; summarizes the dependent variable of the observed curriculum; and delineates the independent variables of student, teacher, and contextual characteristics which may influence teacher decision-making toward curriculum. An analysis of how the intervening variable of teacher decision-making influenced the curriculum is also included.

#### I. CASE STUDY REPORT: SCHOOL SITE 1

School Site 1 was a small school district in Northwest North Carolina. Site visits were conducted on November 20th, 28th, December 6th and 13th, 1995. Interviews were completed on January 2, 1996.

##### A. Obtaining Permission to Conduct the Study

A letter requesting permission to conduct the study from the researcher and a letter of support for the research from the researcher's university advisor, Dr. Harold McGrady, was sent to the school district superintendent on October 11, 1995. The researcher called the superintendent and received permission to conduct the study on October 24, 1995. The researcher then called the Exceptional Children's Program Administrator (ECPA)

and discussed the various available classrooms in which to conduct the study. The school site was chosen from the options discussed and agreed upon by both the researcher and the ECPA. The researcher met with the school principal and the teachers involved on November 9, 1995, to discuss the study.

Parent permission forms were distributed by the teacher on Monday, November 14, 1995. Of the ten forms sent home, nine were returned. Six of those parents granted permission for access to student records. Three parents denied permission and one parent declined permission following a telephone discussion of the study with the researcher.

### B. Demographic Information

The school district involved reported an Average Daily Membership (ADM) of 6,328 in fifteen schools. The school district employed one Exceptional Children's Program Administrator and one Exceptional Children's Program Supervisor.

The elementary school involved in the study served two hundred students in grades four and five. The school had five self-contained classrooms serving students with learning disabilities, educable mental retardation, behavioral-emotional handicaps (K-5), trainable mental retardation, and severe/profound mental retardation. The school served a total of forty-eight students with special education needs.

The classroom participating in the study was the self-contained classroom which served students with educable mental retardation. There were ten students in the class. Students began the day together and then were grouped with students from the self-contained class serving students with learning disabilities for different curricular areas. In the morning students were grouped by ability level for instruction in communication skills and mathematics. Students were grouped by grade level in the afternoon for social studies and science. A

small number of students were mainstreamed for all Basic Education Plan (BEP) areas such as music, art, physical education, and foreign language. They were also mainstreamed for lunch.

Students were taught by one teacher in the morning and a second teacher in the afternoon. There was one teaching assistant in each classroom.

Demographic information for this classroom is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**School Site 1: Student Demographic Information**

Class Diversity	Gender: 6 Female, 4 Male	Race: 8 Caucasian, 2 African-American
	Grades: 8 fourth grade, 2 fifth grade	
Student IQ n=5	Full Scale: Median 69	Mean: 67.5
	Range: 64-70	
	Test: Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R)	
Achievement Grade Level n=5	Reading: Median: 1.3	Mean: 1.66
	Math: Median: 1.4	Mean: 1.82
	Writing: Median: 1.4	Mean: 1.62
		Range: 1.0-2.6
		Range: 1.1-3.6
		Range: 1.2-2.8
Adaptive Behavior	Composite: Median: 6.4	Mean: 7.1
		Range: 5.2-8.9

**C. IEP Information**

Student IEPs were very detailed in the areas of reading, writing and math. There was very little specification of topics to be taught in social studies or science. Several IEPs noted that students were to have their basic skill instruction in the areas of language arts and math integrated around social studies topics from a lower-grade level, but these topics were not listed.

IEPs were very similar when delineating mainstreaming information and areas of participation in the regular classroom. Content on the IEP was found to be consistently taught in the classroom in the areas of language arts and math. Tests and quizzes in the classroom were similar to those listed on the IEP. A description of IEP information is presented in Table 3



Table 3  
School Site 1: IEP Information

Number of students receiving related services	Transportation: 2 students Physical Therapy: 1, (once per nine weeks). Speech: 1, (twice a week for 30 minutes each session)
Mainstreaming:	85% (27.5 hours) in special education class 15% ( 5 hours) in regular education class
Participation in the regular class for:	lunch, D.A.R.E., music, art, P.E., Spanish
Areas addressed:	communication skills, math, writing, speech, physical therapy.
Mean number of goals and objectives:	Reading 3, Math 7, Writing 2

**TOPICS OF STUDY**

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: retelling a story, summarizing the main idea, selecting reading materials, decoding strategies, pre-reading organization, using library to find materials and answer questions, identifying key words, condensing, classifying and ordering w/ proper sentence structure, objectives from the 2nd grade Standard Course of Study

MATH: numeration, geometry, patterns/classification, measurement, problem-solving, graphing, computation, telling time, counting money, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, ordering from least to greatest, recognizing fractions, comparing and contrasting polygons, using a calculator.

WRITING: write two or more paragraphs and editing with proper capitalization, spelling, punctuation, , write five to ten sentences, find writing mistakes in a journal.

PHYSICAL THERAPY: maintain ambulatory status, carry out home exercise program, improve gross-motor skills.

SPEECH subject-verb agreement, interrogative structures, plural nouns, possessives.

METHODS OF EVALUATION:

Work samples, observation, teacher-made tests, teacher evaluation with manipulatives, anecdotal records, Woodcock-Johnson sub-tests, oral evaluation, worksheets, portfolio and journal entries, activities, demonstrations, second-grade communication skill and math benchmarks.

Note. D.A.R.E. = Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education; P.E. = Physical Education

#### D. Description of the Curriculum

Although the class was served by two teachers, the curriculum in each class was similar. The researcher observed each class for the equivalent of two days. A description of the curriculum is summarized in Table 4.

Curriculum Format. Both teachers used a basic skills approach organized around a central theme (traditions, Thanksgiving, Christmas, The Velveteen Rabbit) to teach reading and spelling. A basic skills approach was also utilized in teaching mathematics. Science and social studies instruction was provided through a parallel curriculum approach based on the fourth and fifth grade Standard Course of Study. Social studies information was also integrated with science instruction. One social studies unit was taught using a thematic unit of "Christmas around the world" through the use of research and communication skill activities.

Curriculum Content Source. Reading, spelling, and math curriculum content consisted of basic skill development as written in the IEP and generated by the teacher. Science instructional material was based on the Standard Course of Study and was not stated in the IEP. Social studies content was based on the Standard Course of Study, and was predominantly teacher-developed, yet was not listed on IEPs.

Questioning Level. Questions were consistently at the data recall level with two instances of higher-level thinking skills at the data processing level. Higher level thinking skill questions were concerned with predicting the weather in different geographical areas and a discussion about religious freedom.

Lesson Purpose. Lessons were most often conducted for review of prior lessons and for drill and practice of previously taught material. New material was presented frequently. Preparation for quizzes occurred in several instances.

Table 4  
 School site 1-Description of the Curriculum

Characteristic	Description of the Characteristic
Curriculum Format	Communication skills and math: Basic skills Science and social studies: Parallel curriculum with North Carolina Standard Course of Study Social studies: one thematic unit and integrated with science.
Source of Curriculum Content	Communication skills and math: Teacher-developed, in IEP, lower-grade Standard Course of Study in IEP. Science and social studies: Standard Course of Study, not in IEP.
Questioning Level	Data recall in all observations excepting two instances where questions were also asked at the data processing level.
Lesson Purpose:	All lessons contained a time for review (100%) Drill and practice of previous material in preparation for tests and quizzes occurred in 55% of lessons New information presented in five lessons (45%)
Instructional activities	Teacher-directed: lecture/demonstration: 9/30 observations or 30%, audio/video aide (2/30 or 6%), guided practice (3/30, 10%), discussion (3/30, 10%) games (2/30, 6%), lab (1/30, 3%) Student-directed: Independent practice (4/30, 13%), other-reading (3/30, 10%), presentation (2/30, 6%), lab (1/30, 3%)
Materials	Reading: lower-grade texts, supplementary texts-new and used. Spelling: teacher-made charts and worksheets. Writing: student journals Math: lower-grade level texts (discarded), commercially-produced or teacher-made worksheets, manipulatives. Science: newspapers, teacher-made charts, maps, commercially-produced kits and demonstration apparatus. Social studies: research materials from the media center. Evaluation: teacher-made oral and written tests and quizzes, teacher observation.
Subject matter:	<u>Communication Skills</u> : listening comprehension, decoding skills, writing sentences, punctuation, vocabulary, reading comprehension, capitalization, reading sight words. <u>Math</u> : liquid measurement, addition, subtraction, counting by 5's and 10's, writing money amounts, identifying coins, making change, telling time. <u>Science</u> : recording, comparing, evaluating weather conditions, writing temperatures, identifying hot and cold weather, using symbols, evaluating temperature differences. <u>Social studies</u> : locating cities and states, using a globe, understanding directions.

Evaluation of student progress, be it to develop baseline or mastery of material, occurred frequently (mostly in spelling, once for a weather test, and several instances during math).

Instructional Activity. Instruction was predominantly teacher-directed. Students were involved as part of the classroom instruction when reading homework or reports aloud to the class. The teachers used primarily a lecture or demonstration approach. Guided and independent practice were used often as well as class discussions. Games were used on occasion especially in reviewing math skills.

Instructional Materials. Reading materials were usually lower grade-level discarded textbooks or supplementary texts compiled by the teacher. Spelling was taught using teacher-made charts and teacher developed worksheets. Writing was taught primarily through the use of student journals. Math materials included lower-level discarded textbooks, commercially-produced and teacher developed worksheets and manipulative materials such as real and play coins. Science materials included the daily newspaper, teacher-made charts, maps, an older, commercially-produced weather book set, and demonstration apparatus, such as a thermometer and a rain gauge. Materials used to teach social studies included library books for research projects and a video camera to film Christmas reports. Material was presented on the chalkboard. Tests and quizzes were teacher-developed and given orally.

Subject Matter. Basic skills were taught throughout the day during the study of several main topics. In reading, the main topics observed included a study of traditions, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The main topic of study in science was the study of the weather in the fourth-grade class. The fifth-grade class centered on the study of how different cultures celebrate Christmas. Math was taught either in isolation through topics such as counting money, telling time, or computation or was integrated in the teaching of science and social studies.

### E. Results of Administrator Interviews

The interview with the Exceptional Children's Program Administrator (ECPA) supported findings concerning the curriculum in the observed classroom. The ECPA was in her first year in the position. She was previously the teacher in the classroom involved in the study. The ECPA concurred with the teachers of the self-contained classroom with regard to long-term student goals, use of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, integration of the IEP goals into the classroom curriculum and instructional strategies to use with students with educable mental retardation. The ECPA strongly believed that the responsibility for the classroom curriculum should rest with the teacher(s). She displayed a great deal of support for the teachers of the self-contained special education class. The ECPA also stressed the importance of continuity in classroom curricula from elementary school through high school by emphasizing the reference to the NC Standard Course of Study and use of a parallel curriculum approach in teaching social studies and science.

The interview with the principal was conducted on the last day of observation. The principal was very supportive of the teachers in the self-contained classroom. He believed that students in the self-contained class should be taught as much of the NC Standard Course of Study as possible. The principal stressed the importance of the teachers to concentrate on basic skill instruction. The principal's feeling was that the teachers should do as much as possible to prepare the students for upper grade education and to live independently after high school. He referred to the difficulties resulting from the students' home situations. The principal felt that the teachers integrated IEP goals in their curriculum as much as possible. He also believed that the curriculum is the primary responsibility of the classroom teacher.

## F. Influences on Curriculum Decision-Making

Factors that may influence the teacher's decision-making about curriculum were determined through a series of interviews. Each teacher was interviewed on three different occasions. The first interview was a structured interview using the predetermined interview protocol (See Appendix G). Subsequent interviews were semi-structured using questions derived from classroom observations (See Footnote 1).

Overall, the researcher asked one hundred twenty-three questions. Of these questions, one set of twenty-five structured questions were asked of each teacher. Ninety-eight semi-structured questions were asked (forty-seven of teacher A, and fifty-one of teacher B). The questions were broken down as follows:

Table 5  
School Site 1: Type, Number and Focus of Teacher Interview Questions

Question type	Student Characteristics	Teacher Characteristics	Contextual Characteristics	Curriculum	
<b>Structured</b>					
Teacher A:	1	11	11	2	
Teacher B:	1	11	11	2	
<b>Semi-structured</b>					
Teacher A:	7	12	10	18	
Teacher B:	9	14	12	16	
<b>Total:</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>38</b>
Teacher A: 72	8	23	21	20	
Teacher B: 76	10	25	23	18	

Footnote 1: Transcriptions of the semi-structured questions and responses may be obtained through the researcher. Correspondence concerning these items should be addressed to Michael Marcela, 1703 Walnut Drive, Mt. Airy, NC 27030.

## 1. Student Characteristics

When considering the reasons behind their selection of curriculum materials, activities, and topics, teachers cited the student characteristics listed in Table 6 most often:

**Table 6**  
**School Site 1: Influence of Student Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making**

Characteristic	Determined by:	Infl. on TDM	Infl. on Curr.
Student level of Achievement	Tchr A: 9/72 questions (12.5 %) Tchr B: 13/72 questions (18%)	Main influence on TDM	Influences Curr. through TDM
Content of the IEP	Tchr A: 6/72 questions (8.3%) Tchr B: 7/72 questions (9.7%)	Influences TDM	Is both a direct influence on TDM and curr.
Past and present experiences	Tchr A: 2/72 questions (2.7%)	Slight influence on TDM	Influences Curr. through TDM
Student learning style	Tchr B: 2/72 questions (2.7%)	Slight influence on on TDM	Influences Curr. through TDM

Note. Infl. = Influence, Tchr = Teacher, TDM = Teacher decision-making, Curr. = Curriculum

**Discussion:** Both teachers' decisions about the development and implementation of the classroom curriculum were primarily based on the level of achievement of the students in their classes. Similarly, both teachers rely heavily on the content of the IEP when making curriculum decisions. Yet, unlike student achievement level which influences the curriculum through the teacher's decision-making, the IEP has a direct influence on the curriculum. The IEP becomes the classroom curriculum in the areas of communication skills and math. It has no influence on teacher decision-making or on the observed curriculum in areas not discussed in the IEP (e.g., science or social studies). Teacher A occasionally took her students' past or present experiences into account when deciding what to teach (e.g., students had experienced Hurricane Hugo, so she taught

hurricanes). Teacher B assessed the students' various learning styles and used a variety of teaching methods to address these different styles.

## 2. Teacher Characteristics

Responses to interview questions linked with classroom observations suggest the teacher characteristics listed in Table 7 as influences on teacher's decisions about curriculum.

**Table 7**  
**School Site 1: Influence of Teacher Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making.**

Characteristic	Determined by:	Infl. on TDM	Infl. on Curr.
Perception of what students need to learn	Tchr A: 11/72 questions (15.3%) Tchr B: 6/72 questions (8.3%)	Main infl. Tchr. A Influences Tchr. B	Infl. curr through TDM
Perception of student interest	Tchr A: 4/72 questions (5.5%) Tchr B: 10/72 questions (13.8%)	Influence on Tchr. A Main infl. w/ Tchr. B	Infl. curr. through TDM
Perception of student ability	Tchr A: 5/72 questions (6.9%) Tchr B: 8/72 questions (11.1%)	Main infl. Tchr. A Infl.; Tchr. B	Infl. curr. through TDM
Beliefs about how EMH students should be taught	Tchr A: 7/72 questions or 9.7% Tchr B: 6/72 questions or 8.3%	Secondary infl.; Tchr. A Influence on Tchr. B	Infl. curr. through TDM
What teacher wants to share with students	Tchr A: 4/72 questions or 5.5%	Influence on Tchr A No infl. on Tchr B	Infl. curr. through TDM
Perception of students' feelings of success	Tchr B: 5/72 questions or 6.9%	Influence on Tchr B No infl. on Tchr A	Infl. curriculum through TDM
Focus of teacher preparation program	Observation	Influences both teachers A & B	Infl. the curr through TDM
Previous teaching experiences	Observation	Influence on Tchr A Tchr B is in 1st year of teaching	Infl. curriculum through TDM

Note. Infl. = Influence, Curr. = Curriculum, TDM = Teacher decision-making, EMH = educable mentally handicapped.



Discussion: Both teachers had their own beliefs about what students liked or disliked, what they could do or had difficulty doing and what students need to learn to succeed in the future. Teacher B attended to students' feelings as they progressed through the class curriculum and instruction. Both teachers had clear ideas about the best way to teach EMH students (e.g., basic skill instruction, integrated curriculum approaches). Both teachers' organization and implementation of their curriculum were similar to the focus of their teacher preparation programs. Teacher A, with experience in the resource setting at the middle school, placed more emphasis on a content area specific approach to the organization of the curriculum.

### 3. Contextual Characteristics

There were a number of characteristics that were related to areas separate from student or teacher influences. These areas stem from the school, classroom, or overall context in which the curriculum was implemented and developed. Contextual characteristics cited most often are listed in Table 8.

Table 8  
School Site 1: Influence of Contextual Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making.

Characteristic	Determined by:	Infl. on TDM	Infl. on Curr.
Use of or reference to NCSCOS	Tchr. A: 9/47 or 19.14% Tchr B: 14/51 or 27.45%	Main infl. on both teachers' TDM	Direct influence on s.s, science
Holidays and seasonal activities	Tchr A: 6/47 or 12.76% Tchr B: 11/51 or 21.56%	Influence on both teachers' TDM	Influences curr. through TDM
Lack of, or inadequate curriculum materials	Tchr A: 5/47 or 10.64% Tchr B: 10/51 or 19.61%	Influence on both teachers' TDM	Direct influence on the curr.
Mainstreaming	Tchr B; 6/51 or 11.76%	Infl. on Tchr B TDM	Direct influence

Note. Infl. = influence, Tchr. = teacher, curr. = curriculum, TDM = Teacher decision-making, NC SCOS = North Carolina Standard Course of Study, s.s. = social studies.

Discussion: Both teachers consistently discussed attempting to teach content from the NC Standard Course of Study, especially with regard to science and social studies units. Many units were centered around holidays such as Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, or Christmas, or precipitated by the changing seasons (e.g., units on weather or Johnny Appleseed). Teachers often used discarded materials, borrowed materials from the regular class or Chapter I teachers, or developed their own. This was due to not having materials available that matched their students' ability levels or the content of the unit to be taught. Teacher B felt that students being pulled out for BEP classes, the D.A.R.E. program, and other activities often influenced what and how she taught.

#### G. Summary

Although students served in the program for the educable mentally handicapped at School Site 1 are taught by two different teachers, the curriculum is consistent throughout the day. In both classrooms there is a strong emphasis on basic skill development in communication and mathematics. The IEP has a direct influence on, and is the basis for curriculum content in reading, writing, language, and mathematics. Both teachers use a parallel curriculum approach and draw their science and social studies content from the NC Standard Course of Study at the fourth or fifth grade levels. The use of this approach and topics taught in either science or social studies were not included on the student's IEPs.

Influences on the teachers' decision-making about the curriculum, as well as those factors that exert a direct influence on the curriculum, are similar for the two teachers. The student characteristics which most influenced decision-making were the students' levels of achievement and the content of their IEPs. Main teacher characteristics influencing their decision-making were perceptions of student learning needs for the future, student interests, student abilities, and the teachers' beliefs about how students with educable mental retardation should be

taught. Contextual characteristics influencing both teacher's decision-making are primarily the use and reference to the NC Standard Course of Study, the lack or inadequacy of available curriculum materials (direct influences on the curriculum as well), and the holidays and seasons.

## II. CASE STUDY REPORT: SCHOOL SITE 2

School Site 2 was a small school district in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. Observations were conducted on November 29th, December 12th and December 19th, 1995 and on January 3rd, 1996. Interviews were concluded at the school on January 3, 1996. The interview with the Exceptional Children's Program Administrator was conducted on January 26, 1996.

### A. Obtaining Permission to Conduct the Study

A letter requesting permission to conduct the study accompanied by a letter from the researcher's university advisor, Dr. Harold McGrady, supporting the research was mailed to the school district superintendent on Thursday, November 2, 1995. Permission to conduct the study from the superintendent and selection of the school site through a discussion with the Exceptional Children Program Administrator (ECPA) was obtained over the telephone on Friday, November 10, 1995. The researcher obtained permission from the school principal by telephone on Tuesday, November 14th. The researcher met with the principal and participating teacher to further discuss the study and schedule the first observation on Wednesday, November 15th, 1995.

Parental permission letters were distributed by the teacher on Monday, November twentieth. Of the eleven letters sent home, seven forms were returned granting permission to access confidential records. Four were not returned.

## B. Demographic Information

The school district involved reported an Average Daily Membership (ADM) of 4,536 in nine schools. The school district employed one Exceptional Children Program Administrator.

The elementary school in School Site 2 served 436 students in Kindergarten through fifth grade. The school had a self-contained special education classroom for twelve students with educable mental retardation, trainable mental retardation, learning disabilities, and "Other Health Impairments". The school also had a resource program serving forty students with learning disabilities, behavioral-emotional handicaps, and other health impairments.

The classroom participating in the study was the self-contained classroom which served students with educable mental retardation, trainable mental retardation, learning disabilities, and other health impairments. There were twelve students in the class. Nine of the students were male, three female. Of the twelve students, eight were students with educable mental retardation, two were students with trainable mental retardation, one student with learning disabilities and one student served as "Other Health Impaired". The classroom was located in a building adjacent to the main building in a large room divided into four smaller rooms. The three other rooms were used for two kindergarten classes. Demographic information is presented in Table 9.

Table 9

School Site 2: Student Demographic Information

Classroom diversity	# of students: 12 Categories served: EMH, TMH, LD, OHI Gender: 9 males, 3 females Race: 7 caucasian, 5 African-American Grade range: K-5
Student IQ N=7	WISC-R: Median: 60.5, Mean 64.8, Range 50-92 Stanford-Binet: 44
Achievement level N=7	Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test-Revised (N=4, Raw scores, grade) Reading: Median; 68 Mean; 67.25 Range; K.0 - 1.4 Math: Median; 60 Mean; 61 Range; K.0 - 2.6 Written Language: Median; 68.5 Mean; 66.75 Range; K.7-1.3 Wide Range Achievement Test -Revised (N=1) Performance at a 2-4 year-old level Test of Early Reading Achievement Test of Early Math Achievement (N=1): Significantly below average Test of Early Written language McCarthy Screening Test: (N=1) Student considered "at-risk".
Adaptive Behavior N=6	Vineland: Median 65 Mean: 57.66 Range: 39-69 No age levels reported- students listed assignificantly behind in all areas. AAMD: (1 student) Deficient in communication, self-sufficiency and personal-social responsibility.

Note: EMH = Educable Mentally Handicapped, TMH = Trainable Mentally Handicapped, LD = Learning Disabled, K = Kindergarten, WISC-R = Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children Revised, AAMD = American Association of Mental Deficiency.

C. IEP Information

Student IEPs were very comprehensive in the areas of communications skills, writing and math. There were many similarities in goals for capitalization, punctuation, writing, reading and math. IEPs were deficient in providing details about topics and information taught in science and social studies.

IEPs were very similar when delineating mainstreaming information and areas of participation in the regular classroom. Content of the IEP was found to correspond with actual classroom instruction in the areas of communication skills and math. IEP information is provided in Table 10.

Table 10  
 School Site 2: Student IEP Information

Related Services	Speech: three students; two times per week for twenty minutes per session; one student; three times per week for forty minutes per session Occup. Therapy: one student; once per week, thirty minutes per session. Three students receive special transportation.
Mainstreaming	Five students: 5 hours per week or 15.38% in the regular classroom and 84.62% in special education. Two students: 7 hours per week or 21.53% in the regular classroom and 78.47% in special education.
Participation in the regular class	Seven students: library, lunch, assemblies, foreign language, P.E., recess, and music (5 students), art (5 students), reading (1 student), math (1 student) and integrated readiness skills (1 student).
Major areas addressed	Speech (4), Reading (7), Spelling (2), Writing (7), Math (7), Occupational therapy and Social skills (1) Oral communication skills (1).

TOPICS OF STUDY:

READING: learn sight words, direction words, sign words, pronounce and identify initial and final consonants, identify all lower and upper case letters, pronounce all letter sounds, name characters, facts, main ideas and predict outcomes from listening to a story, re-read words with "s" suffix, pronounce endings of rhyming words.

SPELLING: Write dictated initial consonants, spell first-grade words.

WRITING: Write address, birthday, first and last name, mother's name, write all upper and lower case letters, punctuate sentences with a period and question mark and capitalize proper names, days of the week, beginnings of sentences.

ORAL COMMUNICATION: State age, address, phone # and birthdate.

MATH: addition and subtraction without regrouping, tell-time (1, 1/2, 1/4 hr. & 5 minute intervals), count, read and write numbers, identify and add coins, make change, 1:1 correspondence, measurement to 1/2", read a calendar.

SOCIAL SKILLS: greet people appropriately and increase independence.

SPEECH: pronounce words in conversation, use nouns, pronouns, comparing words, superlatives, wh-questions, negatives, produce target sounds in initial, medial, and final position in isolation, syllables, words, phrases, sentences, oral conversation and reading, identify present tense verbs, possessives and irregular plurals.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: color and draw circles, trace letters, stand on one foot, walk a 1" tape line, use a hole punch, sort coins, crumple paper, apply even pressure on a glue bottle.

Methods of Evaluation	Teacher-made or published tests, The Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills, work samples, student demonstrations, teacher observation, oral check by teacher and therapy data.
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#### D. Description of the Curriculum

The classroom was observed for three sessions per day for a total of four days. Each observation session lasted from thirty to sixty minutes. Observations revealed a great amount of consistency and continuity in the development and implementation of the curriculum. Findings of the observations are described below..

Curriculum Format. The teacher uses a thematic unit curriculum approach to organize basic skill instruction in the areas of communication skills, science and social studies. She also collaborates with the Speech/Language Pathologist to plan and implement weekly Integrated Speech Therapy lessons centering on development of basic language and speaking skills within the context of a particular thematic unit. In mathematics, the teacher primarily uses the Math Their Way curriculum, a lower-grade level commercially-produced curriculum emphasizing the use of manipulatives to teach basic mathematical concepts.

Curriculum Content Source. Curriculum content in the area of communication skills is derived from the student's IEP's. Social studies and science topics and skills were predominantly teacher-developed and not listed in the IEP. The Math Their Way curriculum was the source of most of the mathematics content taught in the class. Although some skills in this curriculum were listed in the IEP, many of the skills taught and the curriculum itself are not mentioned in IEP's.

Questioning Level. Questions were mostly at the data recall level. There were several occasions during social studies, science and mathematics lessons that the teacher asked questions at the data processing level. In one lesson on choosing between health and unhealthy foods, several data application questions were asked of students.

Lesson Purpose. Lessons were presented primarily for review of prior learned information or for drill and practice of previously learned skills. The

teacher often used a question-answer approach to facilitate discussion and review. New information was presented in most lessons, yet such information tended to be more in-depth additions to material presented in prior lessons. The teacher also sought to determine prior knowledge occasionally either when beginning a new topic or expounding on a specific area of a new topic.

Instructional Activity. Lessons were predominantly teacher-directed discussions or teacher-directed lectures, presentations or demonstrations. Student-directed activities tended to be either independent practice or work with math manipulatives in the Math Their Way curriculum.

Instructional Materials. The teacher uses a variety of materials across different subject areas. The Math Their Way curriculum often dictates the use of certain materials such as geoboards, unifix cubes, wood blocks, assorted "junk boxes", macaroni, and recording strips. For reading lessons, the teacher utilized picture or flash cards, student made materials, magazines, a Magna-doodle toy, and several worksheets. In science and social studies areas, materials cited included high-interest library books, teacher-made items, and charts.

Subject Matter. The main areas of instruction in math were creating and recording patterns, counting change, counting by 5's and 10's, identifying coins, telling time, graphing, and beginning addition. Content of the communication skills curriculum implemented in the classroom included identifying initial vowels and consonants, phonetic spelling, reading sight words, direction words, sign words, and sentences, sequencing events, and listening comprehension. Areas of study in science and social studies were healthy vs. unhealthy foods, the food pyramid, personal safety, Norway and snow, and the circus.

More detail about the characteristics of the observed curriculum are presented in Table 11.



Table 11  
School Site 2- Description of the Curriculum.

Characteristic	Description of the characteristic
Curriculum format	Basic skills for all communication skills Thematic Unit approach for all social studies and science areas Lower-grade basic skills curriculum for all mathematics
Source of curriculum content	Teacher developed in the IEP for all communication skills. Teacher developed not in the IEP for all social studies and science areas Commercially-packaged mathematics curriculum (Math Their Way) for all math lessons. Most content taught was listed in the IEP. Some content and the specific curriculum used were not mentioned in the IEP.
Questioning level	Data recall 84.21 % of the questions asked (48/57 observations). Data processing 15.79% of all questions asked (9/57 observations).
Lesson Purpose	Review prior lessons 42% or 29/69 observations Introduce new material 21.74% or 15/69 observations Drill and practice 17.4% or 12/69 observations Determine prior knowledge 8.7% or 6/69 observations Question/response 5.8% or 4/69 observations Evaluate baseline or mastery 4.3% or 3/69 observations
Instructional activity	Teacher directed: 78.57% or 44/56 observations % of all lessons      % of teacher-directed lessons discussion      30.36 (17/56)      38.44 (17/44) lecture      26.78 (15/56)      34.10 (15/44) guided pract.      10.71 (6/56)      13.63 (6/44) Indept. pract.      3.57 (2/56)      4.55 (2/44) games      3.57 (2/56)      4.55 (2/44) Group review      3.57 (2/56)      4.55 (2/44) Student directed: 21.43% or 12/56 observations % of all lessons      % of student-directed lessons Hands-on      8.93% (5/56)      41.66 (5/12) Indept. pract.      8.93% (5/56)      41.66 (5/12) games      3.57% (2/56)      16.66 (2/12)
Materials	Math manipulatives: 20/54 observations or 37.04% Teacher-made materials: 11/54 or 20.37% (charts, shopping lists, flashcards, measuring instrument) Supplemental texts (library books): 7/54 or 12.96 % Worksheets: 5/54 or 9.26% Picture cards: 4/54 or 7.40% No materials-discussion: 3/54 or 5.55% Demonstration apparatus (Judy clock): 1/54 or 1.85% Toys (magna-doodle): 1/54 or 1.85%

(table continues)

Table 11  
School Site 2: Description of the Curriculum

Characteristic	Description of the characteristic
Subject matter	<p><u>Speech</u>: pronouncing sounds, identifying initial consonants in words, phrases, syllables, and conversation.</p> <p><u>Math</u>: In IEP-identifying pennies, nickels, dimes, adding coins, simple addition, telling time to hour, half-hour and quarter-hour, measuring by the yard, completing a calendar, counting. Not in IEP-creating and recognizing patterns, recording patterns, graphing, comparing greater and less than</p> <p><u>Reading</u>: word decoding skills, spelling words, reading sentences, listening comprehension, reading sight, direction and sign words, pronouncing letter sounds.</p> <p><u>Science</u>: identifying healthy vs. unhealthy foods.</p> <p><u>Social studies</u>: Norway, the circus.</p>

Note: IEP = Individualized Education Program, pract. = practice, indept. = independent

E. Results of Administrator Interviews

The Exceptional Children Program Administrator (ECPA) was very supportive of the teacher in the self-contained classroom. Her expectations for students' achievements in the future (e.g., graduation from high school, unskilled labor) were similar to those of the teacher. The ECPA discussed her approval and support for the curriculum in the self-contained classroom and the various instructional strategies used in the class. She emphasized the necessity of continuity in the curriculum for students with special needs from Kindergarten through high school. This continuity is reflected in the "hierarchy of skills" referred to by the classroom teacher. The ECPA mentioned several meetings of all the teachers of self-contained special education classrooms in the school district where continuity of the classroom curriculum and IEP content across programs and grade levels was discussed. The ECPA also felt that the teacher in the self-contained classroom consistently integrated IEP content into the classroom curriculum. She was very supportive of the teacher and the self-contained program.

The principal also stressed the effectiveness of the teacher. He was very supportive of the teacher. The principal discussed many of the creative

instructional activities the teacher used in the classroom and the progress of the students in the class. He believed that the teacher was the "expert" in working with students with special needs and deferred to her judgment in curriculum and instructional matters. The principal talked of discussing curriculum materials and activities with the teacher on several occasions. He concurred with the teacher on expectations of the students' future accomplishments. Lastly, he felt that the teacher integrates the IEP in the classroom curriculum very well.

#### F. Influences on Curriculum Decision-Making

Four interviews with the classroom teacher provided information on factors which may influence the decisions made about the observed curriculum. All questions focused on one of the four areas of student, teacher or contextual characteristics and inquiries into facets of the observed curriculum. Overall the researcher asked eighty-seven questions. Twenty-five of the questions were structured (see Appendix G) and sixty-two were semi-structured (see Footnote 2). The areas of inquiry per type of question are described in Table 12.

Table 12  
School Site 2: Type, Number and Focus of Teacher Interview Questions.

Type of Question	Student charact.	Teacher charact.	Contextual char.	About Curriculum
Structured	1	11	11	2
Semi-structured	6	22	12	22
Total: 87 questions	7	33	23	24

Footnote 2: Transcriptions of the semi-structured interview questions and responses are available from the researcher. Correspondence concerning this item should be addressed to Michael Marcela, 1703 Walnut Drive, Mt. Airy, NC.

## 1. Student Characteristics

Teacher interviews revealed a number of student characteristics that influence the teacher's decision-making about curriculum. Identified student characteristics are described in Table 13.

Table 13  
School Site 2: Influence of Student Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making

Characteristic	Determined by:	Infl. on Teacher decision-making (TDM)	Infl. on the Curriculum
IEP Content	16/87 questions (18.39%)	Main Influence on TDM	Direct Influence on the curr. and infl. curr. through TDM
Achievement level	14/87 questions (16.09%)	Strong influence on TDM	Influences curr. through TDM
Depth of student understanding	8/87 questions (9.20%)	Influence on TDM	Influences curr. through TDM
Students' individual family situations	4/87 questions(4.60%)	Influence on TDM	Influences curr. through TDM

Note: TDM = Teacher decision-making, Infl. = Influence, IEP = Individualized Education Program  
curr. = curriculum

Discussion: The teacher bases her curriculum in reading, writing, spelling and math on the goals, content and evaluation instruments delineated on the IEP. In several instances the teacher commented that she taught a particular skill because the student would be tested on material contained in the Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills, the main evaluation instrument mentioned in the IEP. As such, many of the IEP goals were directly related to particular goals on the Brigance instrument. The teacher also uses the student's achievement level as a starting point in developing her curriculum. The depth of a student's understanding, or degree of mastery, of particular skills or content is a significant influence on the teacher's decisions whether to continue to teach a subject or skill or to reteach previous skills. On several occasions, the teacher discussed a

decision to stop teaching a specific area or activity due to the student's lack of understanding or progress in that area. Many of the social studies and science topics were taught as a result of students' family situations which hindered the student's knowledge about or experience with a particular area of study.

Examples of such instances were units on nutrition, because students came from homes where balanced meals were rare; the circus, because students didn't know or had not been to a circus; and the making of Christmas projects, because many of the students could not afford to buy presents for parents or relatives.

**2. Teacher Characteristics**

Six areas related to the teacher's past preparation and experience or her present set of perceptions about students were identified as influences on decision-making toward curriculum. Table 14 describes these factors.

Table 14  
School Site 2: Influence of Teacher Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making.

Characteristic	Determined by:	Infl. on TDM	Infl. on Curr.
Perception of student learning needs	19/87 questions (21.84%)	Main infl. on TDM	Infl. the curr. through TDM
Beliefs about what students need to know in the future	15/87 questions or 17.24%	Strong infl. on TDM	Influences the curr. through in TDM
Beliefs about student ability	11/87 questions or 12.64%	Influence on TDM	Influences curr. through TDM
Teacher preparation program	6/87 questions or 6.90% Classroom observation	Influence on TDM	Influences curr. through TDM
Previous teaching experiences	4/87 questions or 4.60%	Slight infl. on TDM	Influences curr. through TDM
Perceptions about student interest	4/87 questions or 4.60%	Slight infl. on TD	Influences curr. through TDM

Note: Infl. = influence, curr. = curriculum, TDM = Teacher decision-making

Discussion: The teacher places a strong emphasis on teaching skills and information that she feels students need to master prior to moving on to other levels. She connects these immediate learning needs with those areas that students will need to know either to move from the elementary school to junior high or for life after high school. The teacher selects curriculum content and instructional activities based on her beliefs about what students are able to accomplish. There was great similarity between the focus of the teacher's teacher preparation program and the observed curriculum, both emphasizing and integrated curriculum approach. The teacher often referred to what she has done in the past and of repeating units of study every four years. Lastly, the teacher often develops instructional units and curriculum content based on topics that she feels students will enjoy and be motivated to learn.

### 3. Contextual Characteristics

Factors that influence the curriculum which cannot be described as related to the students' or the teacher's characteristics are termed contextual characteristics. Table 15 describes these various factors.

Table 15  
School Site 2: Influence of Contextual Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making.

Characteristic	Determined by:	Infl. on TDM	Infl. on the Curr.
Reference to district policy or NC Standard Course Study	18/87 questions (20.69%)	Main infl. on TDM	Direct infl. on curr. and infl. through TDM
Reference to commercially available curricula and materials	12/87 questions (13.79%)	Strong infl. on TDM	Direct infl. on curr. and infl. thru TDM
Holidays and seasons	10/87 questions (11.49%)	Strong infl. on TDM	Influences curr. through TDM

(table continues)

Table 15  
School Site 2: Influence of Contextual Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making.

Characteristic	Determined by:	Influence on TDM	Infl. on curriculum
Range of grade levels in the classroom	5/87 questions ( 5.75%)	Influences TDM	Influences curr. through TDM
Mainstreaming	4/87 questions (4.60%)	Slight infl. on TDM	Influences curr. through TDM
School-wide curriculum emphasis	2/87 questions (2.30%)	Slight infl. on TDM	Influences curr. through TDM

Note: Infl. = influence, curr. = curriculum, TDM = Teacher decision-making, NC = North Carolina

Discussion: The classroom curriculum is based on an adherence to an unwritten, yet understood "hierarchy of skills" which was developed by the school district's teachers of self-contained classrooms from pre-school through high school. This hierarchy of skills, combined with referral to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study provides the framework for development of the observed curriculum. The teacher is very reliant on commercially curriculum materials such as the Math Their Way curriculum and commercially-prepared word lists and reading programs. The Christmas holidays and the changing seasons were the impetus for the development of several different units and activities. The teacher mentioned the difficulty present in developing curriculum for a self-contained classroom that includes students from a large number of grade levels. The teacher often will base decisions about what and when to teach a particular subject on which and how many students will be absent from the self-contained class due to their participation in their regular classrooms. Lastly, school-wide emphases on curriculum and instructional issues such as whole language and Math Their Way seemed to have influenced the teacher to organize the class curriculum to include these programs.

### G. Summary

The teacher primarily used a thematic unit approach to curriculum with intensive instruction in the basic skill areas of math and communication skills. Math was taught using the Math Their Way commercially-available curriculum package. The IEP has a direct influence on what skills were taught in these areas. Thematic units were based around topics in social studies or science. Science and social studies topics were not included on the IEP. The teacher used a variety of curriculum materials in the classroom including worksheets, supplementary texts and math manipulatives.

The curriculum in the classroom was the result of the influence of several factors. Student characteristics influencing teacher decision-making about the curriculum were IEP content, student achievement level, depth of student understanding and student home situations. Teacher characteristics found to influence the curriculum included the teachers' perceptions and beliefs about student learning needs, what students will need to know in the future, student abilities, student interests, and the teachers' teaching preparation program, and her past experiences. Contextual characteristics influencing the curriculum were reference to the NC Standard Course of Study and a district-wide curriculum policy, use of a commercially available curriculum, holidays, range of grade levels in the class, and effects of mainstreaming.

### III. CASE STUDY REPORT: SCHOOL SITE 3

School site 3 was from a small system in the Northwest mountain region of North Carolina. Observations were conducted on January 16th and 25th, 1996 and February 23rd and February 29, 1996. Interviews were concluded on February 29, 1996.



### A. Obtaining Permission to Conduct the Study.

A letter requesting permission to conduct the study accompanied by a letter from the researcher's university advisor, Dr. Harold McGrady, supporting the research was mailed to the school district superintendent on Thursday, November 2, 1995. The superintendent discussed the study with the researcher during a telephone conversation on November 16, 1995 describing that the request had to go before the school system's internal review board prior to final approval. The researcher submitted copies of informed consent forms, interview protocols and additional information concerning the maintenance of confidentiality to the board for their review on December 4, 1996. Permission to conduct the study was granted on December 11, 1996. The researcher discussed the study with the school site principal and classroom teacher in phone conversations on December 20, 1995, receiving final permission, answering further questions and setting up a time for the first classroom observation.

Parental permission letters were sent out to parents on Wednesday, January 17, 1996. Of the thirteen letters sent home, three were returned granting permission for students to be interviewed and for access to confidential records, four denied permission and six were not returned. Due to the low response rate, a second set of permission letters were sent on February 23, 1996 to those students who did not return the first letter. Of these letters, one was returned granting permission to conduct the archival record review and interview, one was returned granting permission for the interview only, and four were not returned.

### B. Demographic Information

The school system reported an average daily membership (ADM) of 4,558 students in nine schools. The school system employed one Exceptional Children's Program Administrator.

The school involved in the study served approximately 800 students

from kindergarten through eighth grade. Administratively, the school employed one principal and two assistant principals. With regard to special education, the school had one self-contained class serving students with educable mental retardation, trainable mental retardation, and learning disabilities. There was also a resource program serving students with learning disabilities. Other students with disabilities such as severe/profound mental retardation, autism, trainable mental retardation, and physical impairments were served in a Center for the Handicapped housed within the school's campus.

The classroom involved in the study served thirteen students overall. Nine students were classified as educable mentally handicapped, three students were considered trainable mentally handicapped, and there was one student with learning disabilities. All students spent most of the school day in the self-contained classroom with some mainstreaming into the regular classroom for areas such as P.E., lunch, music, art, and foreign language. The class was served by one teacher and one teaching assistant. Student characteristics are noted in Table 16.

Table 16  
School Site 3: Student Demographic Information.

Classroom Diversity	# of students: 13 Gender: 8 male, 5 female Grade range: K-8	Categories Served: EMH-9, TMH-3, LD-1 Race: 12 Caucasian, 1 Afro-American
Student IQ N=4	WISC-R: Median: 58	Mean: 59      Range: 50-70
Achievement Level N=3	Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Test (Raw score, grade level)	
	Broad reading:      Median: 1.2      Mean: 1.2      Range: 1.0-1.4	
	Broad math:          Median: 2.4      Mean: 2.0      Range: K.3-3.5	
	Broad Written Lang.: Median: 1.2      Mean: 1.3      Range: 1.0-1.6	
Adaptive Behavior	Vineland Test of Social Maturity: Median: 50      Mean: 53      Range: 41-59	

Note: EMH = Educable Mentally Handicapped, TMH = Trainable Mentally Handicapped, LD = Learning Disabled, "K" = Kindergarten, WISC-R = Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children, Revised, Lang. = Language.

### C. IEP Information

Student IEP's were well-written and truly individualized for each student. Although there were similarities in the general areas of study addressed in each IEP, there were vast differences with regard to the amount of participation in the regular classroom, number of short-term goals per area and specific short-term goals. The IEP's were very detailed concerning goals and objectives for communication skills, writing, and math for each student. Other areas addressed per student need included objectives for behavior, P.E., general knowledge, and speech. The content of the IEP's in these areas was observed being taught consistently in the classroom.

IEP's were not specific with regards to other curriculum areas. There were not any goals addressing topics or areas of study in science or social studies. Neither of these topics were taught either separately or integrated in large amounts in other subject areas. The IEP's also did not include goals for the pre-vocational skills class the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders attended daily, and for Adaptive P.E., which all students received twice a week. Table 17 lists additional information about student IEP's.

Table 17

School Site 3: Student IEP Information.

Related services	Speech: One student: Twice per week for forty minutes per session Two students: Twice per week for thirty minutes per session
Mainstreaming	Mean percentage time in regular class: 17.87 % of the day (1.25 hours) Mean percentage time in special class: 82.17% of the day (5.25 hours)
Regular class participation	lunch (4 students), library (3 students), music (3 students), art (2 students), assemblies (3 students), PE (2 students), recess and math (1 student)
Major areas addressed	reading (4 students), math (4 students), writing (4 students), speech (2 students), general knowledge (2 students), P.E. (1 student) behavior (1 student), motor skills (1 student)
Mean number short-term goals	reading, (9), math, (9), writing (7), speech (6), general knowledge, (5), behavior (4), P.E., (3), motor skills (4).

(table continues)

Table 17  
School Site 3: Student IEP information.

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Topics of Study

Reading- comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, sight words, suffixes, read sentences, phrases and paragraphs, decode vowel sounds and blends, recognize letters, state beginning, medial and final sounds, use content to make predictions

Writing- write words, sentences and paragraphs, copy sentences, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, complete an outline, sequence sentences from a story and identify and use the eight parts of speech.

Math- counting, addition, subtraction, tell time (hour, half-hour and quarter-hour), recognize and write coin values, fractions, measurement, word problems, use a calculator, sorting objects, identifying patterns, multiplication, identifying greater than and less than, reading numbers and division.

General Knowledge- using a calendar, thinking skills, sequencing instructions, making decisions, using a map, understanding community living, understand everyday concepts, knowledge of personal information.

Behavior- maintain eye contact in conversation, complete daily assignments, comply to expectations and consequences, speak appropriately, follow directions, repeat directions.

P.E.-Balance on one foot, hop on one and two feet, skip and catch a ball.

Speech- Identify word classes, determine needed information, identify sources of information, determine the quality of information, answer questions about information, make decisions, identify and use subjective and progressive pronouns, state the meaning of spoken words.

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Methods of Evaluation	Teacher-made test, observation, student work samples, informal probes, daily notes and checklists.
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Note: P.E. = Physical Education

#### D. Description of the Curriculum

The classroom was observed for three sessions per day for a total of four days. Each observation lasted from thirty to sixty minutes. Observations revealed consistency and continuity in the development and implementation of the curriculum. Findings of the observations are summarized below.

Curriculum Format. The teacher utilizes a basic skills curriculum approach for the areas of reading, language arts and math. The basic skills often were organized around a central theme such as chocolate or ice cream.

Curriculum Content Source. Skills to be addressed in the areas of reading, language arts, and math are listed in the student's IEP and are based either on the student's grade level or a lower grade level of the NC Standard

Course of Study. Actual materials and curriculum content derives primarily from a combination of sources. Reading and math skills are taught using a commercially packaged curricula, namely the Stevenson Reading Program and the Stevenson Simple Math Program. Other programs used include the FIRSTSTEPS reading program, strategies from the NC Standard Course of Study and the Touchmath curriculum.

Questioning Level. Questions were predominantly at the data recall level. Occasionally while working with either older students or with a higher level reading group, the teacher would ask a question at the data processing or data application levels.

Lesson Purpose. Lessons were typically a combination of review of prior lessons, review of homework, instruction in new, specific skill areas or for additional drill and practice.

Instructional Activity. Lessons were predominantly teacher-directed reviews, discussions or direct instruction in specific skill areas. The teacher was the main determinant of all classwork assigned and reviewed. Occasionally students would lead a small group in review of a homework assignment or to read aloud a writing selection.

Instructional Materials. The teacher used a variety of materials across all subject areas. There was consistent and significant use of worksheets and workbooks throughout the day, especially in reading and math areas. Students read from commercially packaged curriculum materials such as the Stevenson Phonics Program workbook and the Wright Group low level readers or from library books that the students chose themselves. Worksheets were used primarily for skill practice, review and homework. Other materials consisted of magazines, flashcards, a marker board, and teacher-made materials such as charts, song sheets, laminated handwriting cards, and wordlists. The teacher used a variety of manipulatives such as candies, counting or place value sticks, coins, clay and small shapes. On several occasions, games such as a Geo-

safari were used to assist students in answering questions, review material or practice previously-mastered skills. Lastly, the teacher consistently brought in items such as Valentine's Day candy for classroom demonstrations.

Subject Matter. In math, the main areas of instruction included addition and subtraction, identifying and understanding the value of money, counting by five's, recognizing patterns, multiplication, counting, writing numbers, and recognizing odd and even numbers. In communication skills, work concentrated on recognizing vowel and consonant sounds in all positions, spelling, cursive and manuscript handwriting, word decoding, identifying nouns and adjectives, correct use of capitalization and punctuation, identifying letters, vocabulary, reading and listening comprehension, recognizing sight words, and reading short passages aloud. In lessons where a social studies or science concept was integrated with either math or reading, skill areas such as describing, observing, predicting and the five senses were addressed. Other areas such as following directions, memory testing and reciting personal information (phone number, address, social security number) were also taught.

Further details about the observed curriculum are listed in Table 18.

Table 18  
School Site 3: Description of the Curriculum.

Characteristic	Description of the characteristic:
Curriculum format	Basic skills curriculum for communications skills and math: 94.53% of observations (69/73) Thematic unit approach for social studies and science: 5.48% of observations (4/73)
Source of curriculum content	Teacher developed in IEP: 69.73% or 53/76 observations Other curriculum with skills listed in IEP: 23.68 or 18/76 observations Regular class curriculum not in IEP: 2.63% or 2/76 observations
Questioning Level	Data recall: 95.77 or 68/71 observations Data process: 2.82 % or 2/71 observations Data analysis: 1.41 % or 1/71 observations

(table continues)

Table 18  
School Site 3: Description of the Curriculum.

Lesson Purpose	Review prior lessons: 38.29% or 36/94 observations Introduce new material: 37.23% or 35/94 observations Drill and practice: 21.28% or 20/94 observations Determine prior knowledge: 2.13% or 2/94 observations Administrative routine: 2.13% or 2/94 observations		
Instructional Activity	Teacher directed: 89.02% or 73/82 observations		
		% of all lessons	% of teacher-directed lessons
	Guided practice	58.53% (48/82)	65.75% (48/73)
	Discussion	10.97% (9/82)	12.33% (9/73)
	lecture/demonstration	9.75% (8/82)	10.96% (8/73)
	games	6.10% (5/82)	6.85% (5/73)
	hands-on	3.66% (3/82)	4.11% (3/73)
	Student directed: 10.98% or 9/82 observations		
independent practice	10.97 (9/82)	100% (9/9)	
Materials	Workbooks/sheets: 22.37% or 17/76 observations		
	Supplementary tests: 17.10% or 13/76 observations		
	Math manipulatives: 15.79% or 12/76 observations		
	Teacher-made materials: 11.84% or 9/76 observations		
	Student-made materials: 6.58% or 5/76 observations		
	Household objects: 6.58% or 5/76 observations		
	Chalkboard: 6.58% or 5/76 observations		
	Demonstrations materials: 5.26% or 4/76 observations		
	Curriculum package books: 2.63% or 2/76 observations		
	Magazines: 2.63% or 2/76 observations		
Prepared charts: 1.32% or 1/76 observations			
Games: 1.32% or 1/76 observations			

Subject Matter

Reading: identifying letter sounds in initial, medial and final positions, building words, reading and listening comprehension, vocabulary, matching letters, sight words, reading recipes, reading sentences, alphabetical order.

Writing: writing letters, spelling, cursive and manuscript writing, capitalization, nouns, adjectives, fiction vs. non-fiction.

Math: subtraction, using money, identifying coin values, counting, recognizing patterns, multiplication, identifying money signs, addition, writing numbers, more/less than, odd and even numbers, place value, sorting, problem-solving.

Social studies: identifying the fifty states.

Science: identifying healthy vs. unhealthy foods, chocolate, interpreting food labels, describing, observing, and predicting, using the five senses.

General Knowledge: stating personal information, following directions, memory testing.

Adaptive P.E.: bouncing, kicking, dribbling, throwing and catching a ball, running, walking, wrestling, playing basketball, stretching, visual tracking.

Note: IEP = Individualized Education Program, P.E. = Physical Education

### E. Results of Administrator Interviews

The Exceptional Children Program Administrator (EGPA) was very supportive of the self-contained special education program. She concurred with the classroom teacher about expectations for student achievement in the future, learning needs of students, and instructional strategies to be used in the classroom. The EGPA talked highly of the teacher in the self-contained classroom. She believed strongly in the need for consistency of curriculum content across grade levels. The EGPA discussed current school district efforts to implement a more expansive inclusion program through alignment of the NC Standard Course of Study and the IEP. This program involves staff development and teacher meetings to develop various curriculum to use in different programs which will facilitate inclusion in the regular class while maintaining an emphasis on meeting student needs. The EGPA felt that although the teacher is ultimately responsible for the curriculum in the classroom, curriculum development should be an activity involving the teacher, administrators, and other interested individuals.

The principal was also very supportive of the teacher in the self-contained classroom. He felt the curriculum in the classroom adequately addressed the needs of the students in the class. The principal discussed the various programs in which the students participate (e.g, prevocational skills, adaptive P.E.) and the various instructional strategies the teacher uses in the class. He saw the teacher as the "expert" with regard to teaching students with special needs and felt that curriculum development for the self-contained classroom was primarily the responsibility of the teacher. The principal cited the involvement of the teacher of the self-contained classroom in selection of textbooks for the school. He felt that the room in which the self-contained class



was located was too small and hopes to be able to correct this situation when construction of a new wing at the school was complete. The principal held beliefs similar to the teacher regarding future expectations of the students.

F. Influences on Curriculum Decision-Making..

Three interviews with the classroom teacher provided information on factors which may influence the decisions made about the observed curriculum. All questions focused on one of the four areas of student, teacher or contextual characteristics and inquiries about the observed curriculum. Overall the researcher asked eighty-nine (89) questions. Twenty-five of the questions were structured (see Appendix G) and sixty-four (64) were semi-structured (see Footnote 3). The areas of focus per type of questions are described in Table 19.

Table 19  
School Site 3: Type, number and focus of teacher interview questions.

Type of Question	Student Char.	Teacher Char.	Contextual Char.	Curriculum
Structured	1	11	11	2
Semi-Structured	11	8	15	30
Total: 89	12	19	26	32

Note: Char. = Characteristics

1. Student Characteristics

Teacher interviews revealed a number of student characteristics that influence the teacher's decision-making toward curriculum. Identified student characteristics are described in Table 20.

Footnote 3. A transcription of the semi-structured interview questions and responses is available through the researcher. Correspondence concerning this item should be addressed to Michael Marcela, 1703 Walnut Drive, Mt. Airy, NC, 27030.

Table 20.

School Site 3: Influence of Student Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making.

Characteristic	Determined by:	Influence on TDM	Influence on the Curriculum
Typical EMH characteristics	11/89 questions(12.63%)	Strong influence	Influences curriculum through TDM
IEP content	6/89 questions ( 6.74%)	Influences and is result of TDM	Direct influence on the a curriculum
Achievement level	6/89 questions(6.74%)	Influences TDM	Influences the curriculum through TDM
Students' home situations	5/89 questions or 5.62%	Influences TDM	Influences the curriculum home through TDM
Student interests	4/89 questions or 4.49%	Influences TDM	Influences the curriculum through TDM

Note: TDM = Teacher Decision-making, EMH = Educable Mentally Handicapped, IEP = Individualized Education Program.

Discussion: When planning and developing curriculum, the teacher most often takes into account several characteristics of her students that are also typical of students with educable mental retardation such as short attention span, poor short-term memory, poor retention of information, difficulty with adapting to changes, and inconsistent, inappropriate behaviors. Most of the curriculum developed from and is consistent with the content of the students' IEPs. Curriculum is based on the students' achievement levels in all areas. The teacher allows students to make personal choices based on their individual interests when selecting reading materials and topics for study.

## 2. Teacher Characteristics

Eight areas related to the teacher's past preparation and experience or her present set of perceptions about students were identified as influences on decision-making toward curriculum. Table 21 describes these factors.

Table 21.

School site 3: Influence of Teacher Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making.

Characteristic	Determined By:	Influence on TDM	Influence on Curriculum
Beliefs about what students will need to know in the future	9/89 questions(10.11%)	Strong influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Perceptions about student abilities	4/89 questions (4.49%)	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Perceptions about what students need to learn now	4/89 questions (4.49%)	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Perception of the relevancy of content	4/89 questions (4.49%)	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Perception of student interests	4/89 questions (4.49%)	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Beliefs about the best way to teach EMH students	4/89 questions (4.49%)	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Past teaching experiences	Observation	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Teacher's teacher preparation program	Observation	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM

Note: TDM = Teacher Decision-making, EMH = Educable Mentally Handicapped

Discussion: The teacher has a clear belief about whether students should learn in school so as to become productive members of society in the future. The reason behind many of her lessons and activities is to hopefully prepare her students for what they will encounter in the upper grades of their schooling as well as for what they will need to know as adults. She ties this belief to high expectations of her students developed from her perceptions of their abilities. In preparation for the future and to meet her expectations, the teacher has a clear sense of what skills and strategies her students need to master from day-to-day.

The curriculum in the class is developed based on the teacher's desire to use materials that she perceives are relevant for and interesting to students to learn. The teacher organizes the curriculum according to her beliefs of what is the best way to teach students with educable mental retardation. She consistently uses curriculum and instructional approaches such as small group and individualized instruction in basic skill areas, math manipulatives, and "real-life" reading materials (e.g., recipes, labels). The organization of the curriculum is further influenced by the teacher's teaching preparation program which emphasized basic skill instruction in communication skills and math, with little or no preparation in teaching content areas such as science and social studies. Lastly, the teacher's past experience as a teacher of students with behavioral-emotional handicaps seems to have influenced the organization of the curriculum. The classroom curriculum and structure is very similar to that of classrooms designed for students with behavioral-emotional handicaps and the teacher stated on several occasions the similarities between such students and her present class.

### 3. Contextual Characteristics

Factors that influence the curriculum which cannot be described as related to the students' or teacher's characteristics are termed contextual characteristics. Such characteristics are often areas that are beyond the control of students or teacher and have some influence over the curriculum and classroom in general. Table 22 describes these various factors.

Table 22

School Site 3: Influence of Contextual Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making.

Characteristic	Determined by:	Influence on TDM	Influence on curriculum
Use of a commercially-available curriculum	17/89 questions (19.10%)	Strong influence	Direct influence on the curriculum
Reference to the NC Standard Course of Study	7/89 questions (7.86%)	Influence on TDM	Direct influence on curriculum and influence on TDM
Curriculum materials available	5/89 questions or 5.62%	Influence on TDM	Direct influence and influences through TDM
Mainstreaming effects	5/89 questions or 5.62%	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Range of grade levels in the class	3/89 questions or 3.37%	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM

Note: TDM = Teacher Decision-making, NC = North Carolina

Discussion: The contextual characteristic that most influences both the teacher's decision-making toward the curriculum, as well as having a direct influence on the curriculum, is the use of commercially prepared curricula. The teacher makes extensive use of the Stevenson reading curriculum, the Stevenson Simple Math curriculum, the Touchmath system and the FIRSTSTEPS reading program. In applying these programs in her classroom, the teacher refers to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study for selection of learning goals and teaching strategies.

The teacher develops her curriculum around a number of curriculum materials at her disposal. She stated that many of her lesson ideas were pulled from the Mailbox magazine, from readers, workbooks, and supplementary texts available, and from texts used in the regular classrooms. Students also used a computer and a number of math manipulatives available for both guided and independent practice.

The mainstreaming of children from the self-contained classroom into their respective regular grade-level classrooms impacted the teacher's decision-making as well. Students moved in and out of the classroom at frequent intervals, leaving the teacher with limited time to conduct group lessons. As a result, the teacher felt that it was most important to address basic skill deficits in communication skill and math areas with the available time, rather than attempt to fit social studies and science instruction whenever time allows.

Along with mainstreaming, the teacher felt that the range of grade levels in the classroom influences her decisions about curriculum. Having to address the needs of students in grade levels from kindergarten to eighth grade provided very little common ground from which the teacher could focus on and provide instruction in additional curricular areas. The teacher stated that if the group was closer with respect to grade levels, she could plan and teach content and activities that would appeal and be more relevant for all the students.

#### F. SUMMARY

The curriculum in the self-contained classroom studied was very consistent and repetitive. A basic skills approach was utilized to teach communication skills and math in small group and one-on-one instruction throughout the day. The IEP is the basis for the skills that are addressed in these areas. Students worked primarily on reading, writing, grammar, and math skills. Other curriculum areas such as social studies and science were taught as they related to the subject of materials used in reading groups. Older students attended a prevocational job exploration program on a daily basis, and all students attended an adaptive P.E. program offered twice a week through the local university. Science, social studies, vocational exploration, and adaptive P.E. areas were not delineated on the IEP.

The curriculum was influenced by a number of characteristics. The typical "EMH-like" characteristics of the students were a prevalent influence along with

IEP content, student achievement level, student home situations and student interests. Teacher characteristics influencing the curriculum included the teachers' beliefs and perceptions about what students will need to know in the future, student abilities, what student need to learn now, relevancy of curriculum content, student interest and views about the best way to teach students with educable mental retardation. Observations revealed that the teacher organizes her curriculum similar to the focus of her teacher preparation program. The teacher's previous teaching experience as a teacher of behavioral-emotionally handicapped students is reflected in her classroom and curriculum organization as well.

The teacher's reliance on commercially prepared curriculum packages and the North Carolina Standard Course of Study were not only influences on her decision-making about curriculum, but were also direct influences on the curriculum. Available curriculum materials, effects of mainstreaming and the difficulty of teaching to a wide range of grade levels within one classroom also were influences on the teacher's decision-making about the curriculum.

#### IV. CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter four described the findings of record review, observations, and interviews at each school sites. A case study approach was used to describe the classroom, present findings and discuss results. Each site report in the chapter described the classroom, student characteristics and IEP information. A detailed synopsis of the observed curriculum in each class was included. Student, teacher and contextual characteristics influencing the teacher's decisions about curriculum were highlighted. The cross-case analysis of the three school sites is included in Chapter five. Conclusions drawn from the cross-case analysis are discussed as are the relationships of the study findings to the literature in the field. Suggestions for practitioners and further study are also included.

CHAPTER 5  
CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS RESULTS  
and  
CONCLUSIONS

OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter provides conclusions concerning the research questions posed for this study. Those conclusions are based on the results from the cross-case analysis of the data. Similarities and differences among the curricula observed in the three sites will be delineated. The independent variables of student, teacher, and contextual characteristics will be discussed in terms of strong, moderate, or mild influences on the intervening variable of teacher decision-making. Factors will be described as direct or indirect influences on the curriculum.

Revisions to the study's theoretical model will be suggested. In addition, significance of the study findings to research in the curriculum field and practice in self-contained classrooms will be explored.

I. ARCHIVAL RECORD REVIEW

A. Student Demographic Information

The classrooms in the study predominantly served students with educable mental retardation. A small number of students with trainable mental retardation and students with learning disabilities were also served in these classrooms. Student demographic information was similar among the sites (see Table 23).



Table 23  
Cross-case analysis: Student Demographic Information.

Characteristic	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3
Classroom Diversity	6 Female, 4 Male 12 Cauc., 1 Afr-Amer 8 fourth gr., 2 fifth gr.	3 Female, 9 male 7 Cauc., 5 Afr-Amer. Grades K-5	5 Female, 8 male 8 Cauc., 2 Afr-Amer Grades K-8
Student IQ	Mean: 67.5 Median: 69 Range: 64-70	Mean: 64.8 Median: 60.5 Range: 50-92	Mean: 59 Median: 58 Range: 50-70
Achievement level	Reading- Mean: 1.7 Math- Mean: 1.8 Writing- 1.6	Reading-Mean: K.9 Math- Mean: 1.0 Writing-Mean: 1.0	Reading-Mean: 1.2 Math-Mean: 2.0 Writing-Mean: 1.3
Adaptive Behavior	Mean raw score: 7.1	Mean raw score: 57.7	Mean raw score: 52.7

Note: Cauc. = Caucasian, Afr-Amer. = African-American, gr. = grade, K = Kindergarten,

### B. Student IEP Information

Although a student's IEP is intended to be designed for his or her individual needs, often there were similarities among student IEPs within a classroom as well as between classrooms. These similarities suggest a strong curricular link between IEP content and curriculum development for the classrooms. IEPs were consistently thorough and similar when discussing content and skills to be taught in the areas of communication skills (i.e., reading, writing mechanics, spelling, handwriting, grammar, and comprehension) and math. In these areas, the content of the IEP was the actual content of the observed curriculum being taught in the class.

IEP's were consistently deficient in addressing other curriculum areas such as social studies, science, health, social skills, P.E., functional, or daily living skills and pre-vocational skills. Yet many of these areas, especially topics in science and social studies, were taught in the classrooms observed. In these

cases, the curriculum content appeared to be developed through either the individual teacher's decision-making, based on the NC Standard Course of Study, or included as an organizing theme for basic skill instruction.

There were also similarities among school sites with respect to the amount and type of related services provided, amount of mainstreaming per week, and the areas of student participation in the regular classroom. Similarities and differences among student IEP's from the three school sites are displayed in Table 24.

Table 24

Cross-case analysis: Student IEP Information.

IEP Information	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3
Related Services	Speech, physical therapy, transportation	Speech, occupational therapy, transportation	Speech, transportation
Mainstreaming	15% in reg. class 85% in sp. education	17.1% in regular class 82.9% in special ed.	17.9% in reg. cl. 82.2% in sp. ed.
Regular classroom	lunch, D.A.R.E., P.E., Spanish music, art	lunch, music, art, P.E., Spanish, library, assemblies, recess	lunch, music, art, P.E., library, assemblies, recess
Main areas addressed and Mean numbers of short-term goals	Reading: 3 Math :7 Writing: 2	Reading: 7 Math : 7 Writing: 7 Speech: 4 Occupat. Therapy: 1	Reading: 9 Math: 9 Writing: 7 Speech: 6 Genr'l Know: 4 P.E.: 4 Behavior: 4
Topics of Study	Basic skills in all areas	Basic skills in all areas	Basic skills in all areas

(table continues)

Table 24

Cross-case analysis: Student IEP Information.

Methods of Evaluation	Student work Observation Teacher-developed Standardized assessments	Student work Observation Teacher developed Standardized assessments	Student work Observation Tchr. developed Standardized assessments
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Note: IEP = Individualized Education Program, reg. = regular, cl. = class, sp. = special, ed. = education, P.E. = Physical Education, D.A.R.E. = Drug and Alcohol Resistance education, occupat. = occupational, tchr. = teacher, gen'l. = general, know. = knowledge.

II. RESPONSE TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following section addresses the research questions posed for this study. The cross-case analyses of the data allow inferences to be drawn in response to each question. Matrices are used to graphically illustrate similarities and differences among sites. A narrative accompanying each matrix reviews the information and summarizes the conclusions.

A. Research Question 1: What is the Observed Curriculum in Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms?

Although each classroom was unique in many ways, there were many similarities in the curriculum in place in each classroom. The main areas of focus in describing the curriculum across the sites and resulting similarities and differences between the sites are illustrated in Table 25.

Table 25

Cross-case analysis: Description of the Curriculum.

Curriculum area	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3
Curriculum Format	Basic skills for math, communication skills Parallel curriculum for social studies, science	Basic skills for math, communication skills Thematic units for social studies, science	Basic skills for communication skills Thematic units for social studies, science
Source of curriculum content	Tchr. developed IEP NCSCOS	Tchr. developed IEP Commerical curricula NCSCOS System curr. policy	Tchr. developed IEP Commercial curricula NCSCOS
Questioning Level	Data recall	Data recall	Data recall
Lesson Purpose	Review prior lessons Introduce new info. Drill and practice	Review prior lessons Introduce new info.. Drill and practice	Review prior lessons Introduce new info. Drill and practice
Instructional activity	Tchr. directed (66%) Student directed (34%)	Tchr. directed (78.6%) St. directed (21.4%)	Tchr. directed (89%) St. directed (11%)
Materials	Lower-grade texts, Supplementary texts, Teacher-made materials, Worksheets, Journals, Math manipulatives, Student-made materials Newspapers Chalkboard.	Supplementary texts Tchr-made materials Worksheets, Journals Math manipulatives Student-made materials Toys	Supplementary texts Tchr-made materials Worksheets Math manipulatives Student-made materials Toys Demonstration items
Subject	Basic skill: reading and math Science: the weather Social studies: traditions and holidays, U.S. geography.	Basic skills: math and communication skills Science: nutrition, seasons, animals Social studies: Norway the circus	Basic skills: math and communication skills Science: nutrition Social studies: Holidays, U.S. geography Adaptive P.E. Prevoc. skills

Note: IEP=Individualized Education Program, NCSCOS= North Carolina Standard Course of Study, curr. = curriculum, info. = information, tchr. = teacher, st. = student, U.S. = United States  
P.E. = Physical education, Prevoc. = prevocational

Results of the cross-case analysis regarding curriculum are described below.

Curriculum Format. Communication skills and mathematics are organized using a basic skills curriculum format. Skills in these areas, especially in the area of communication skills, often are organized around a central idea or theme such as Christmas, the weather, the circus, or chocolate.

Curriculum formats vary for instruction in other curriculum areas. Science and social studies were taught using a parallel curriculum format based on the NC Standard Course of Study, or a thematic unit curriculum format developed through the teacher's personal decision-making.

Source of Curriculum Content. Curriculum content is drawn from many areas. In communication skills, curriculum content is most often teacher-developed basic skills listed in the IEP. Mathematics content is most often teacher-developed basic skills or from commercially-available curriculum packages using skills addressed on the IEP. Social studies and science content are drawn from either the NC Standard Course of Study (appropriate grade level or lower-grade level), a teacher-developed curriculum, or are included as an aside to a commercially-available communication skill curriculum.

Questioning Level. The questioning level is predominantly data recall in all curriculum areas. Occasionally questions at the data processing or data analysis levels may be asked, yet this occurs rarely.

Lesson Purpose. Lessons are conducted for three main reasons: to introduce small amounts of new information; to provide for drill and practice of previously learned skills; and to review previous lessons.

Instructional Activity. Instruction in the self-contained classroom is primarily teacher-directed activities. Most often instruction is provided through lecture, guided practice, hands-on activities, discussions or games. Activities become student-directed when reviewing homework, student projects, or class assignments.

Curriculum Materials. Teachers in self-contained classrooms used a variety of materials. Reading and communication skills most often were taught using supplementary texts, journals, and worksheets. Math skills were taught using math manipulatives, discarded texts, and worksheets. Science and social studies were taught using supplementary texts, demonstration apparatus, household objects, and kits. Teacher-made materials were used over all subject areas. Student-made materials were used sparingly in teaching math and communication skills.

Subject Matter. Communication skills subject matter consisted of basic skills in areas such as decoding skills, identifying letters and words, reading and listening comprehension, spelling, handwriting, capitalization, punctuation, and vocabulary. Skill areas taught in math were computation, telling time, identifying and using coins, counting, number and pattern recognition, measurement..

Science topics taught included units on the weather, nutrition, animals and habitats. Social studies subject matter focused on holidays and traditions, U.S. geography, a study of Norway, and the circus. Other curricular areas taught included prevocational skills and adaptive P.E.

B. Research Question 2: What is the Influence of Student, Teacher, and Contextual Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making toward Curriculum in Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms?

Data obtained from teacher, student, and administrator interviews, along with information from classroom observations, suggest the influence of a number of characteristics on the teacher's decision-making toward the curriculum. The degree of influence of student, teacher, and contextual characteristics is described as being "strong", "moderate", or "mild". A characteristic is defined as being a "strong" influence if mentioned in all three school sites. A "moderate" influence was cited in two of the sites. Characteristics considered to be "mild"

influences were mentioned in one of the school sites. Influences on teacher decision-making about curriculum are described in Table 26.

Table 26  
Cross-case analysis: Influences on Teacher Decision-Making about Curriculum.

Degree of Influence	St. charac.	Tchr charac.	Contextual charac.
Strong: present in all three sites	Achievement level	Perception of students' abilities	Reference to NCSCOS
	Contents of the IEP	Perception of individual student learning needs Perception of students' interests Previous teaching experiences Focus of teacher preparation program	Availability of suitable curriculum materials Removal of students from class due to mainstreaming
Moderate: present two sites	Home and family situations (Sites 2 & 3)	Beliefs about the best way to teach EMH students (Sites 2 & 3) Beliefs about what students need to know for future. (Sites 2 & 3)	Use or commercially-available curricula (Sites 2 & 3) Adherence to system-wide polioy (Sites 1 & 2) Range of grade levels in the classroom (Sites 2 & 3) Seasonal Activities (Sites 1 & 2)
Mild: present in one site	Characteristics typical of EMH students (Site 3) Depth of student understanding (Site 2) Student learning style (site 1) Student's past experiences (site 1)	Perceptions about students' feeling of success. (Site 1) Perception of the relevancy of curr. content (Site 3) What teacher wants to share with students (Site 1)	School-wide curricular emphasis (Site 2)

Note: St. = student, charac. = characteristics, tchr = teacher, IEP = Individualized Education Program, NCSCOS = North Carolina Standard Course of Study, EMH = Educable Mentally Handicapped, curr. = curriculum

Discussion: Each teacher exhibited various influences on her decision-making about curriculum. Several student, teacher and contextual characteristics were common to all the teachers involved. The characteristics common to all three sites are discussed below.

Student characteristics. The independent variable of student characteristics was determined to influence teachers' decision-making about curriculum. All four teachers took into consideration the students' levels of achievement as measured on standardized achievement tests (e.g., the Woodcock Johnson Achievement Test) or through daily classroom observation and evaluations. Achievement levels between all classrooms were similar, ranging from kindergarten to second-grade levels in the subject areas of reading, math and written language. Curriculum content in all three sites was implemented within these ranges.

The content of the IEP was influential in all three sites. Curriculum content taught in the three classrooms was based on, and is similar to the content of, the IEPs in the areas of communication skills (e.g., reading, comprehension, spelling, writing) and math. Accordingly, IEP's were deficient when addressing social studies, science and other curriculum areas and these areas were taught least often, or without significant focus in all three classrooms. All teachers discussed the importance of writing an IEP based on the individual student's needs and expressed the use of the IEP as a basis for their curriculum decisions.

Teacher characteristics. The independent variable of teacher characteristics was the most influential of all the variables. All teachers expressed the concept that they select curriculum content based on several factors. These factors were primarily their personal perceptions and beliefs about the students they teach. Perceptions about an individual student's learning



needs, or what a student needs to learn at the current moment in order to master higher level skills, were an important influence on all three teachers. Teachers also relied on their perceptions of what their students were capable of accomplishing or learning as a basis for curriculum development. The perception that their students would enjoy learning about a certain subject or do a certain activity often was pivotal in a teacher's decisions about curriculum content.

It became obvious through observations that some factors influence the teacher's decisions about curriculum even though teachers did not discuss these factors at length. One such factor was that of the focus of the teacher's professional preparation program. A teacher at School Site 1 one was initially trained in middle grades education, including coursework in the content areas of social studies and science, and her curriculum reflected this. She specified times for the instruction of these areas every day. The teacher at School Site 2 was taught how to use an integrated curriculum approach in her teaching preparation program, and this is the approach used in her current classroom. School Site 3 teacher was trained in specific skill instruction in reading and math. The curriculum in school site three is organized around specific skill instruction in reading and math.

Also the teachers' past teaching experiences was observed to be influential toward their curriculum decision-making. A teacher in school site one previously taught all curricular areas (e.g., reading, math, science and social studies) in a resource class at the middle school and currently teaches these areas in the elementary school. The teacher at school site three taught students with behavioral-emotional handicaps for her first year and a half of teaching. Her classroom is currently organized similar to programs for the students with behavior-emotional handicaps-very structured and very teacher-directed with a strong emphasis on discipline.

Contextual characteristics. The independent variable of contextual characteristics also influenced the teacher's curriculum decision-making. The most influential characteristic was the reference to or use of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (either the student's current grade level or a lower grade level) in developing curriculum for the self-contained classroom. All teachers discussed referring to the state curriculum in deciding what to teach in all areas or to decide on a particular strategy to use to teach a particular skill.

Availability of appropriate curriculum materials was an influence on the decisions teachers made about what content to teach and how to teach a particular topic. Teachers reported that they used any materials they could "beg, borrow, or steal" when implementing their curriculum. Teachers at all school sites were either limited or assisted in the implementation of their curriculum on the basis of the materials available and the appropriateness of these materials for their students. Discarded lower-level math and reading textbooks were the driving forces behind math and reading instruction at School Site 1. Having a large number of "ditto master" books of worksheets and activities at various levels and sufficient materials to implement commercial curricula assisted teachers at School Sites 2 and 3.

Lastly, the mainstreaming of students into regular classrooms influenced the decisions teachers made about curriculum. In each classroom, students left the self-contained classroom for their regular classroom at numerous intervals throughout the day. Teachers talked about being in the position of deciding which is more important: the curriculum in their classroom or involvement with non-handicapped peers. As a result, the curriculum often suffered with the elimination or reduction of time dedicated to teaching social studies and science. Teachers reported teaching what they could when they had a certain child or when they had the whole class together.

C. Research Question 3: What is the Influence of Student, Teacher, and Contextual Characteristics, and Teacher Decision-Making about Curriculum on the Observed Curriculum in Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms?

In comparing the data across all three cases, several characteristics can be described as having a direct influence on the observed curriculum in the classrooms. These characteristics, when taken together with the individual teacher's decision-making about the curriculum, help shape and transform the intended curriculum into the actual curriculum experienced by the students.

A characteristic is deemed as having a direct influence on the curriculum when it helps to define, frame, or in some way limit the curriculum decision-making sphere of the teacher. A characteristic may dictate curriculum format, content, and instructional strategies that the teacher should use in the classroom. Characteristics may work to put tangible limits on the implementation of the curriculum. Some characteristics may unconsciously interact to shape the decisions that teachers make about curriculum development and implementation.

Characteristics that appeared to exert a direct influence on the curriculum are listed in Table 27. Each characteristic is listed and described in terms of the number of sites in which it was present and how it might influence the dependent variable: the observed curriculum.

Table 27  
Cross-case analysis: Direct influences on the Curriculum.

Characteristic	Type of characteristics	# of sites	Influences the curriculum by:
Reference to NCSCOS	Contextual	3	Dictates curriculum content to be implemented by the teacher.
Content of the IEP	Student	3	Creates the basis for and dictates the curriculum content for the classroom.

(table continues)

**Table 27**

**Cross-case Analysis: Direct Influences on the Curriculum**

Characteristic	Type of characteristic	# of sites	Influences the Curriculum by:
Effects of mainstreaming	Contextual	3	Limits the amount of time and students available to teach a full curriculum.
Teacher decision-making about curr.	Combination of all factors	3	All characteristics combine to consciously or unconsciously limit the teacher's decisions about curriculum.
Availability of appropriate curr. materials	Contextual	3	Available materials define and limit the format, content, scope and sequence of the curriculum.
Use of a commercially-available curricula (Sites 2 & 3)	Contextual	2	Limits the curriculum by dictating format, content, scope and sequence.
School system curriculum policy (Sites 1 & 2))	Contextual	2	Dictates curriculum format and content to be implemented by the teacher.

Note: NCSCOS = North Carolina Standard Course of Study, IEP = Individualized Education Program, curr. = curriculum.

**Discussion:** Characteristics such as reference to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, use of a commercially-available curriculum, and reference to a school system curriculum policy furnish the teacher with basic information necessary for curriculum development. The use of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, either the chronological grade level or a lower grade level curricula, was present in all three sites. Use of commercially available curriculum such as the Math Their Way or the Stevenson Simple Math curriculum occurred in sites 2 and 3 respectively. School Site 1 followed an understood school system policy to adhere as much as possible to the NC Standard Course of Study. School Site 2 followed an understood system-wide hierarchy of skills in place for all self-contained classrooms. Students were expected to master a

number of certain skills prior to their promotion to the next level of schooling. In all these cases decisions were made for the teacher in areas such as learning objectives, main curriculum areas and topics for instruction, teaching strategies, and suggested materials.

Characteristics such as the availability of curriculum materials and the effects of mainstreaming influenced the curriculum by limiting the curriculum format, content, scope, or sequence. School Site 1 used a parallel curriculum to teach science and social studies, yet did not have either regular classroom textbooks or simplified textbooks for students to use. As such teachers created their own versions of the curriculum while borrowing or making their own materials. Mainstreaming was an influence in school sites 2 and 3. Teachers had difficulty teaching curriculum areas such as science and social studies due to a lack of time when all students were in the classroom at the same time. At these sites, teachers felt it more important to use the time when all students were together for communication and math skill instruction.

The individual teacher's decision-making about the curriculum exerted a strong direct influence on the curriculum. All facets of the curriculum were a result of the combined influence of many student, teacher, and contextual characteristics. The combination of student characteristics, the background, beliefs and perceptions of the teacher, and contextual characteristics come together and form a "schema" through which the teacher filters all decisions about the curriculum. This schema is one of the main determinants of the translation of an intended curriculum such as the Standard Course of Study into the curriculum actually experienced by the students. Each teacher makes decisions using a different schema developed from their student's characteristics, their own characteristics, and characteristics of their environment. Teacher decision-making about curriculum is in itself an independent variable influencing the dependent variable of the observed curriculum.

The IEP was shown to have a greater influence on the curriculum than expected. In the areas of communication skills and math, the teacher was found to move through a level of decisions related to IEP development prior to a series of additional decisions concerning the implementation of the curriculum. The IEP is the starting point for the curriculum and exerts considerable influence on all decisions following IEP development, especially implementation of the curriculum.

### III. CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE STUDY

The results of the cross-case analysis suggest several general conclusions that can be drawn concerning the curriculum in self-contained special education classrooms, the role of the teacher in curriculum development, the importance of the IEP in curriculum development, and the factors that influence the curriculum in the self-contained classroom. Conclusions drawn from the study are:

1. Students served in the self-contained classroom are very similar with regard to scores on standardized evaluation instruments. Most students with educable mental retardation served in the self-contained classroom had IQ scores in the low-to-mid sixties, achievement scores ranging from Kindergarten to upper first-grade, and similar adaptive behavior levels.
2. The curriculum in the self-contained special education classroom is predominantly teacher-developed with few opportunities for student input or decisions about curriculum content.
3. The teacher is the key determinant of the curriculum in the self-contained classroom. The curriculum is developed primarily by the teacher in isolation, without input from other professionals. Hence, teachers feel a great deal of "ownership" toward the curriculum implemented in their classrooms
4. It is difficult to clearly delineate the separation point between curriculum and instruction. The instructional methods that a teacher uses when teaching

content are related to and a product of the student, teacher, and contextual characteristics that influence the development of the curriculum.

5. The curriculum in the self-contained special education classroom focuses on the development and remediation of basic skills in communication skills and mathematics. Science, social studies and other areas of study are taught infrequently and content is often at the teacher's discretion.

6. Teachers in the self-contained special education classroom are primarily concerned with the teaching of facts and basic information. There were few opportunities for students to develop problem-solving or higher level thinking skills.

7. Participation with non-handicapped peers in the regular classroom was limited for students served in the self-contained special education classroom. Students were taught in the self-contained classroom for over eighty percent of the week.

8. IEPs are a strong influence on the curriculum in the self-contained special education classroom. Skills and areas of study listed on the IEP were an integral part of the curriculum in the self-contained special education classroom.

9. IEPs are deficient in specifying curriculum content in areas such as science, social studies, health, and other areas. Social skills were not included on the IEPs or observed to be taught in any of the self-contained classrooms.

10. Student characteristics (e.g, achievement levels, IEP content), teacher characteristics (e.g., perceptions, beliefs about and expectations of students, background), and contextual characteristics (e.g., state-mandated or commercial curricula, materials, local curriculum policies) combine to create the teachers' decision-making schema about the IEP and the curriculum. These characteristics also have a direct influence on the IEP and the curriculum outside of the teachers' decision-making schema.

#### IV. REVISION OF THE THEORETICAL MODEL

The results of the study support the original theoretical model describing the process of teacher decision-making about curriculum. The original model is useful to address teacher decision-making about curriculum in areas excluded from the IEP such as science and social studies. Yet the model is insufficient when describing the role of the IEP in teacher decision-making about curriculum in areas included on the IEP (i.e., communication skills, math, behavior, related services). In these areas, the IEP is the prime component in a series of decisions occurring prior to those judgments which impinge on curriculum implementation.

Figure 2 represents the revision of the original theoretical model. A main change is the inclusion of the IEP as an influence. In the revised model, teacher decisions occur at two levels. Phase I decisions are those concerning the development of the IEP. Student, teacher and contextual characteristics may directly influence the IEP or may combine to create the teacher's decision-making schema which also influences the IEP. Decisions are then made about the content of the IEP (e.g., long and short-term goals), methods to evaluate student progress, and expectations for student learning. The IEP becomes the intended curriculum for the student(s).

The development of the IEP is the beginning of a cycle of decisions about curriculum made throughout the school year. After IEP development, the teacher then begins a series of Phase II decisions leading to implementation of the curriculum. At Phase II of the model, the content of the IEP becomes a student characteristic, and may influence teacher characteristics (e.g., expectations), or contextual characteristics (e.g., use of a commercial curriculum) to create the teachers' decision-making schema about the curriculum. Student, teacher, and contextual characteristics, and the teachers' decision-making schema all may have a direct influence on the curriculum. Phase II decisions include teacher judgments about areas such as format, content, questioning level, activities, and



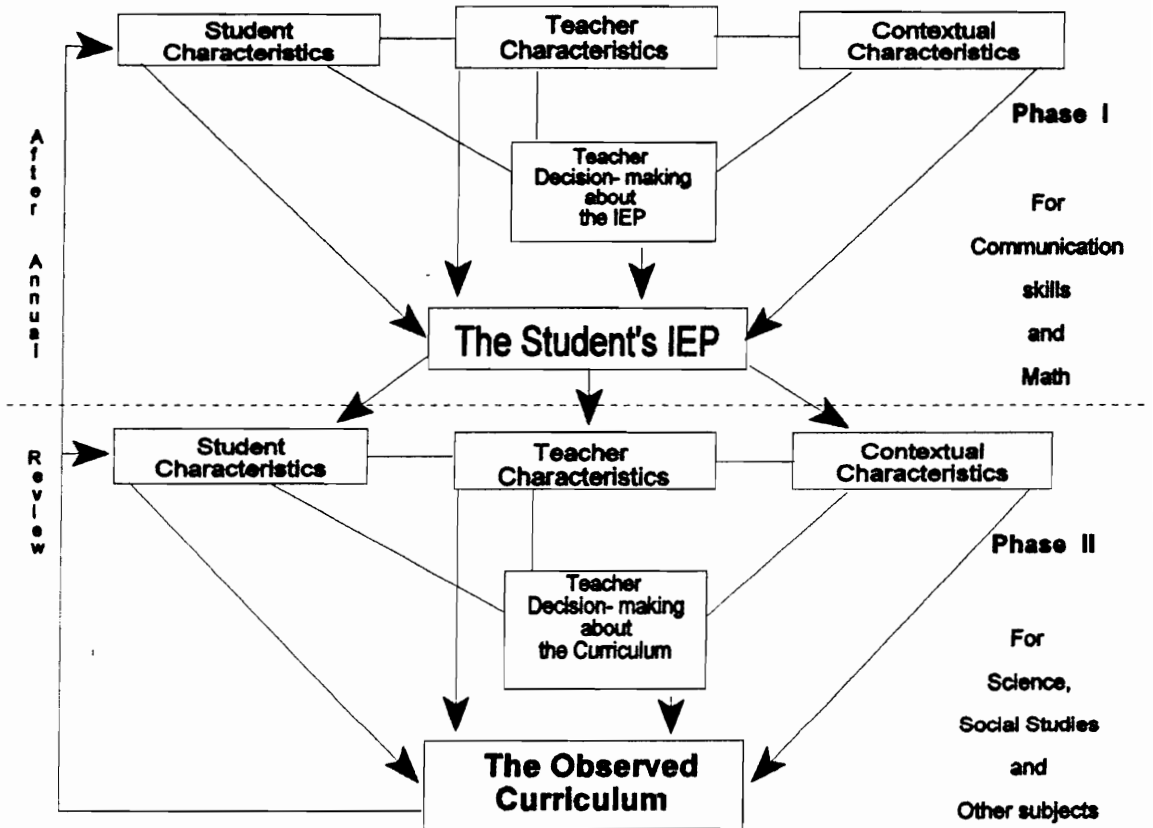


Figure 2. Revised theoretical model describing the teacher decision-making process for self-contained special education classrooms.

materials. Decisions at this level may occur at any time from prior to the school year to a day-by-day and minute-by-minute basis. For areas not included on the IEP, the decision-making process begins at Phase II of the model.

Following the annual IEP review the teacher returns to making Phase I decisions about the development of a new IEP and moves once again through the model. The teacher also repeats the Phase II decision-making process for those curriculum areas not included on the new IEP. (See Figure 2)

## V. RELATIONSHIP OF THE FINDINGS TO RESEARCH LITERATURE

### Curriculum in the Self-Contained Special Education Classroom.

The study supports prior work in the field of special education curriculum. In agreement with Kirk and Gallagher (1983), classrooms in the study stressed intensive basic skill development in the areas of communication skills and math. The study also supports McLaughlin's (1994) encouragement of the use of a variety of curriculum approaches. In addition to a basic skill development curricular focus, each site also demonstrated an emphasis on teaching skills and strategies to facilitate future learning. A pre-vocational skills curriculum was in place at one of the sites. McMillan (1982) states that the goal of the curriculum should be for all students to be able to live and work successfully in society. All teachers stressed the importance of teaching skills that students would need to progress from their current achievement level or to succeed in future school, work, and community living environments.

The use of an integrated curriculum approach has been found to be an appropriate method for organizing the curriculum in self-contained classrooms.

(Heiss & Mischio, 1972) All three classrooms used an integrated approach to teach at least communication skills. School Site 2 used an integrated approach throughout all areas of the curriculum.

Research also suggests that, while teaching special education students necessary basic skills is important, the curriculum should also serve as preparation for placement into the regular classroom. (Sands et al., 1995) All teachers discussed the importance that students from self-contained classrooms be mainstreamed to and eventually move into the regular classroom for a majority of the school day. To facilitate this movement, each teacher referred to the NC Standard Course of Study when developing the curriculum. School Site 1 further encouraged eventual regular class placement by utilizing a parallel curriculum approach for science and social studies.

#### The Influence of Student, Teacher, and Contextual Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making about Curriculum.

The study supported previous research in the area of influences on teacher decision-making about curriculum. Johnston (1993) cited students' educational needs and personal backgrounds as influences on the teachers' curriculum decisions. Kohl (1967) based his curriculum on the interests of his students. In this study, the students' achievement levels, the IEP, and a number of characteristics, including children's home situations and student interests, were all influences on teacher decision-making.

Previous research states that teacher characteristics have been found to be most influential on teacher's curriculum decisions. Teachers' views about teaching, how students learn, the best approach to curriculum, and the curriculum content have all been cited as significant influences (Johnston, 1993, Tobin and

Lemasters, 1992, O'Neil, 1988). Other areas such as teachers' beliefs about what students need to learn, student abilities, and student's probable futures all are influences on teacher decision-making. (Pape, 1993, Brady et al., 1992, Johnston, 1993). Other characteristics such as the teacher's previous experiences, (Thornton, 1992, Johnston, 1993) and the teacher's teaching preparation program (Pape, 1993) have also shown to be influences on decision-making about curriculum.

Interviews of all the teachers in the study revealed similar influences. Teacher perceptions about students' present and future learning needs, student interests, student abilities, and the best way to teach EMH students each were found to be influential on curriculum decision-making. Similarly, there was an observed influence of the teachers' past experiences and teacher training programs.

Contextual characteristics influencing the curriculum in the classrooms in the study were similar to factors cited in previous research. Concurrent with previous findings (Thornton, 1992, Pape, 1993, Klein, 1979 and McCutcheon, 1981), the availability of appropriate curriculum materials such as textbooks and supplementary materials was one of the main influences on the classrooms in the study.

There was a difference between the findings of the study and prior research in the area of reference to state-mandated curriculum. Johnson (1993) states that there is no influence of a state-mandated curriculum on teacher decision-making. Yet all the teachers in the study reported referring to and using objectives from the NC Standard Course of Study when writing IEPs and deciding on curriculum content. Two sites also referred to basing curriculum decisions partly on an understood system-wide curriculum policy.

Influence of Student, Teacher, and Contextual Characteristics, and Teacher Decision-Making on the Curriculum.

The findings of the study support previous research in the field of curriculum deliberation. The work of Charles Schwab, Fenwick English and others states that the intended curriculum is transformed through the decision-making process of the teacher. English uses the word "interactive" to describe the transformation of curriculum. The study demonstrated that the development of curriculum occurs through several levels of teacher decisions. As the teacher moves from one level to another, decisions are filtered through student, teacher, and contextual characteristics. This filtering creates what is termed in the study as a "decision-making schema" which has a direct influence on the curriculum. This schema is similar to what Walker (1971) described as a curriculum deliberation "platform". The platform is the sum total of teacher beliefs and perceptions that guide curriculum decision-making. In the study, the teacher's decision-making schema influenced both the development of the IEP and the implementation of the curriculum.

Most notable, the study suggests a finding not suggested in prior literature. Although Goodlad (1979) describes three levels of decision-making: societal, institutional, and instructional, the study suggests the addition of a decision-making level in the area of special education curriculum. In the study, special education teachers were expected to adhere to the societal decision-making inherent in the NC Standard Course of Study when possible as well as the institutional decision-making level of system-wide special education curriculum policy. Yet the development of an IEP for special education students requires an additional phase of curriculum decisions at the instructional level. In the first phase, teachers assimilate the results of societal and institutional decisions with their own decision-making schema to personalize the curriculum in the form of the IEP for each student. Teachers then operate at the instructional level described

by Goodlad (Phase II of the model) in implementing the curriculum. Teacher decision-making about curriculum is more complicated in the field of special education.

## VI. IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS FOR PRACTITIONERS

The findings of the study are valuable to both administrators and teachers in the special education field. Overall the study highlights the necessity of reducing the amount of attention paid to satisfying regulatory compliance in the service delivery of special education in favor of increased emphasis on curriculum development in special education classrooms. The classrooms involved in the study utilized different, but appropriate, curricula for the students involved. Teachers and administrators would do well to become familiar with the many different approaches to curriculum in self-contained classrooms. The classrooms in the study highlighted weaknesses in the provision of instruction in areas such as science and social studies. If students are to move from self-contained classrooms to more inclusive settings, a lack of basic knowledge in these areas will only hinder their success in the regular classroom. All classrooms in the study instructed students primarily at the data recall level. There were few attempts to develop problem-solving abilities or higher-order thinking skills. Yet students will need these skills to be self-sufficient in the years to come. Also there were very few examples of situations in which students made important decisions in the classroom. Students with mental retardation often have difficulties making prudent decisions throughout their lives. The curricula observed did not teach these skills. Only by knowing these shortcomings can practitioners such as administrators and teachers seek to identify and correct similar areas of weakness in their own schools and school systems.

The study also illuminated the importance of administrator support for the self-contained classroom teacher in addressing the influence of contextual

characteristics on the curriculum. Areas such as the availability of curriculum materials, the effect of mainstreaming, the influence of state and local curriculum documents and policies, use of commercially available curricula, range of grade levels in a class, and school-wide curriculum programs all were shown to influence teacher decision-making about curriculum or the curriculum itself. All these areas can be controlled to some extent by an administrator working to support the teacher. Exceptional children program administrators, curriculum supervisors, and principals can work to purchase necessary materials and curricula. Administrators can attempt to keep the range of grade levels in a classroom within certain parameters. School-wide curriculum programs can be designed to include and maximize benefit when applied to special education classes. Administrators can work more closely with teachers on curriculum and IEP development. Appropriate alignment of the mandated curriculum with the learning needs of students in the self-contained classroom, the design of system-wide curriculum policies that address all major content areas without sacrificing necessary attention to individual needs, and development of mainstreaming and inclusion programs that maximize instruction time in the self-contained class while allowing for significant participation with non-handicapped peers are all curriculum issues that can be accomplished with increased administrator involvement.

The finding that there is an influence of the teachers' professional preparation program on curriculum decisions suggests a need for changes in such programs. The teachers in the study organized their curriculum similar to the approach emphasized in their teaching preparation programs. Teachers may be more likely to use a greater variety of curriculum approaches if exposed to many different classrooms and teachers in their undergraduate teaching preparation program. Universities and colleges which have undergraduate special education teacher preparation program could facilitate prospective teachers' knowledge about various approaches to curriculum by providing field

experiences in varied settings and more comprehensive instruction in the area of special education curriculum.

The study supports the view that the teacher is the most important "cog" in the curriculum development process. The curriculum in each school site was largely the result of the influence of student, contextual, and especially teacher characteristics on the curriculum. Administrators need to be aware of the influence that a particular teacher may bring to a self-contained classroom. When hiring or relocating staff, an administrator should take extra care and time in attempting to ascertain a teacher's background, perceptions, and beliefs which may influence their curriculum. By being knowledgeable about characteristics that influence a particular teacher's decision-making about curriculum, administrators can more adequately hire or place that individual in a setting which requires the curriculum that the individual would most likely create. An administrator who knows that a certain teacher was trained in the integrated curriculum approach can use that knowledge to place the teacher in a program best served by an integrated curriculum approach. The study suggests that the teacher will implement such an approach in that classroom.

The study also calls for teachers to become more reflective about their own teaching practices and beliefs. By becoming more aware of their own biases and influences on the curriculum, teachers can better identify both strengths and weaknesses in their instruction and overall programs. Understanding their own perceptions and beliefs and how these beliefs influence practices may better prepare teachers to solve problems that occur in the classroom or with particular students. Teachers can facilitate improvement of the overall self-contained special education curriculum by working to overcome or mitigate the negative or to accentuate the positive results of their own IEP and curriculum decision-



making schemas. The more reflective and understanding a teacher is about their own biases and practices, the more likely that teacher is to make personal and professional improvements of which their students shall reap the most benefit.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY.

The findings of the study support research in the fields of curriculum deliberation and special education curriculum. Conclusions made from the study discuss similarities and differences in curriculum, suggest a number of influences on curriculum in the self-contained classroom, and describe the existence of a two-tier curriculum decision-making process unique to special education. Teacher decision-making is currently an area not often addressed or researched in special education. The study provides a basis for further research in this area. Suggestions for future study include:

1. Replication of the study in different types of special education self-contained classrooms (i.e., programs for students with behavioral-emotional handicaps, specific learning disabilities, trainable mental retardation, visual impairments, and severe and profound handicaps).
2. Replication of the study in different special education settings such as resource classrooms, inclusion programs, or special education schools.
3. Replication of the study in different schools and school system settings. The study was conducted in small school systems in predominantly rural areas. Two of the schools were located in economically depressed communities. There may be different curricula and influences on the curriculum in medium or large school systems, in metropolitan cities, in different states, or in schools and school systems in areas of higher socio-economic status.
4. Replication of the study in different grade levels such as pre-school or primary levels, and in middle school or high school grade level programs.

5. Research into the area of special education teachers' decision-making about the IEP. This area was found to be unique to special educators and requires more study so as to further support the finding of a two-tiered decision-making process.

6. Research into the area of factors that influence teacher decision-making about instructional methodology. Teachers may use various instructional strategies and approaches to teach the same content. Student, teacher, and contextual characteristics are influences on curriculum and may also influence classroom instruction. This study suggests that curriculum and instruction may be inseparable. Further research comparing factors that influence curriculum and those that influence instruction may provide increased understanding of the relation between the two areas.

## RESEARCHER COMMENTARY

### OVERVIEW OF THE SECTION

This section is included to give the researcher opportunity to discuss weaknesses in the classroom observations, state personal opinions on the strength of the data from interviews, and expand on issues of debate raised by the study.

### I. WEAKNESSES IN CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Classroom observation can be a very subjective means of gathering data. What a researcher observes can be influenced by any numbers of factors inherent in the individual (e.g., beliefs, personal interests, feelings toward the subjects). These areas may subject to further limitation due to the researcher working alone. As a result, the researcher may not observe all that is possible to observe at one time, or may miscode or make on-the-spot subjective judgments about what occurred in the classroom

The researcher feels strongly that the observations were an honest and accurate portrayal of what was occurring in the classroom. The observation instrument was easy to use, and there were few instances where what was occurring in the classroom did not align with a specific coding selection on the instrument. In these few instances where there was a difference between the classroom activity and the instrument, the researcher made a note on the form and developed an interview question to address the area of concern. Yet without the assistance of additional observers, it is difficult to verify the accuracy of the observations.

There were occasions where several different activities were occurring simultaneously in the classrooms, especially at School Site 3. On these occasions, the researcher feels strongly that the observations are accurate representations of what was occurring in the classroom. Again, additional observers would possibly have recorded activities that the researcher may have missed.

Areas of the observations in which the researcher relied on his personal, subjective judgments while coding classroom occurrences were decisions relating to the source of curriculum content and questioning level. It was often difficult to clearly decide while observing from where particular curriculum content was drawn (e.g., the standard course of study, a lower-grade level text, teacher-developed). In these instances, the researcher made a note on the observation form and asked the teacher specific questions about the difficult-to-code content. Coding of the questioning level as the teacher asked various questions also required subjective decisions by the researcher. Although coding was not difficult in most situations, as the questions asked of students were obviously at the most basic data recall level, there were instances where a question may have been perceived differently by another observer. Several questions at the data recall level may have been perceived at the data processing level or those at the data processing level could have been considered data application questions. The determination of the questioning level is the one area of the observations that could have benefitted most from substantiation by another researcher.

Concern over the questioning level findings suggests a weakness in the observation instrument. The "questioning level" section uses a coding system from the Cognitive Levels Analysis Interaction Model (CLAIM) by Schrable and Minnis (1969). This system was selected because of its ease of coding. The researcher felt when developing the instrument that the fewer options for coding of questions would decrease the number of subjective decisions about which

level a particular question belonged, reduce the emphasis on the instructional component of teachers' questions, and provide greater understanding about the teacher's philosophy and other factors that may influence the curriculum. The teacher who asks a large number of data recall questions may do so because of her belief about student abilities, her belief about curriculum content, her need to control student behavior through short responses, or any number of other influences. The CLAIM system was used to assist in ascertaining the teachers' underlying beliefs about curriculum. The researcher was remiss in specifically addressing the reasons for the high number of data recall questions in teacher interviews.

## II. PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS OF DATA OBTAINED THROUGH INTERVIEWS

### Teacher Interviews

The researcher feels strongly that the teachers interviewed were honest and accurate in their responses to both structured and semi-structured questions. All four teachers involved were nervous and hesitant during the first interview. One teacher at School Site 1 brought "notes" with her to this interview. Yet, as the interviews proceeded, all the teachers became very comfortable, open and relaxed. The teacher at School Site 2 was the most interested in answering questions and took much more time with her responses. Teacher B at School Site 1 was very nervous at the beginning of the interview process, but became very animated and open during the last two interviews. Teacher A at School Site 1 and the teacher at School Site 3 were consistently short with their responses. This may be due to the fact that these two teachers were often the busiest (needing to attend staff development and district, staff, school-base and IEP meetings) and most pressed for time. Yet these teachers consistently gave

clear-cut, descriptive answers to all questions. The teacher at School Site 3 was very interested in the researcher's opinions about inclusion and the curriculum development project underway at her own school.

Analysis of the teacher interviews was completed by the researcher without review or substantiation by another researcher. As the researcher replayed the tapes of the interview, he noted the different reasons that the teachers stated for particular curriculum decisions. Following the review of all the interviews, the researcher grouped similar responses under categories which summarized the responses (e.g., beliefs about student abilities, IEP content, reference to the NC Standard Course of Study). When completing the cross-case analysis, the researcher compiled all the within-site findings together. There was no review of the interviews by another researcher. Such a review would have served to substantiate and validate the researcher's categorization of responses. Substantiation and validation of the categories and results of the analyses would have strengthened the study's findings and conclusions.

#### Administrator Interviews

The interviews with the school principals and Exceptional Children Program Administrators were, in the researcher's opinion, more formal and reserved than teacher interviews. Administrators at each site carefully framed their responses and were slow to begin their answers. The researcher feels that these administrators were concerned that their responses would be assessed as to their appropriateness or legality, or that they were being in some sense evaluated through the interview. Principals' responses tended to be short and to the point. The Exceptional Children Program Administrators were much more interested in the questions posed by the study and hence, were more open and vocal in their responses. All administrators became more relaxed and talkative after the tape recorder was turned off, and carried on lengthy conversations with

the researcher about topics such as special education funding, inclusion, special education curriculum, and topics of personal interest. This was particularly true of the principal at School Site 2 and of the Exceptional Children Program Administrators at School Sites 2 and 3. Although more reserved and cautious, all administrators provided adequate information for the researcher to draw conclusions about the role the administrators played in special education curriculum development. Comments made by administrators were substantiated and verified in the teacher interviews.

### Student Interviews

The student interviews were an enjoyable component of the research methodology. Most of the students were noticeably nervous at the beginning of the interview. The students settled down and relaxed quickly and were very open and honest with their responses. The researcher had to restate questions often and in some instances, especially at School Site 3, rephrase questions for better understanding. Student responses corresponded with teacher and administrator interview responses and provided a clear picture of the curriculum as it was occurring in the classroom. The researcher feels the student interviews were very beneficial to the study and were accurate representations of the curriculum as experienced in the classroom.

### III. DISCUSSION OF ISSUES OF DEBATE RAISED BY THE STUDY

The study encourages discussion of a number of issues in both the special education and curriculum fields. Such issues include the efficacy of the curriculum used in the classrooms, the role of the IEP in curriculum development, the influence of the teacher on the curriculum, and the importance of undergraduate level special education teacher training programs to curriculum

development. One issue was present throughout the study and remains unresolved. This is the question of whether or not curriculum and instruction are separate entities, or if curriculum and instruction are inseparable. Traditionally, it has been believed that curriculum is the planning stage, or "what" is taught to the student. Instruction is believed to be "how" the teacher conveys the curriculum content to the student.

Yet the study suggests that the separation point between curriculum and instruction is not clearly defined. The area of questioning level was included as part of curriculum in the study. This is commonly believed to a component of instruction. The researcher did not attempt to evaluate the appropriateness or frequency of questions, specific question content, or how the questions relate to future student evaluation: all aspects of instruction. Questioning level was recorded to ascertain the individual teacher's philosophical underpinnings to her decisions about curriculum. Similarly, curriculum materials were part of the classroom observations. If the study was focused on instruction, the researcher would have made assessments on the appropriateness of the materials, how the teacher used the materials, and if the materials were helpful in facilitating student learning. In the study, materials were assessed as a way of determining sources of curriculum content, influences on the curriculum, and reasons for particular curriculum decisions made by the teacher. Lastly, an area such as instructional activity is commonly thought of as a component of instruction. In evaluating instruction, the observer may evaluate the appropriateness of the activity, the instructional methodology inherent in the activity, and the effectiveness of the activity to promote student learning. In the study, the researcher observed and analyzed instructional activity as a way of determining where across the spectrum of curriculum definitions the particular teacher's curriculum would fall. A curriculum that is predominately teacher-directed suggests several possible beliefs the teacher may hold concerning student abilities, the role of students in



learning, the importance of the teacher in the classroom, and so on. In all cases, traditional areas of instruction were analyzed as to their role in curriculum decisions.

The researcher believes that curriculum and instruction can be seen as separate and distinct disciplines when preparing prospective teachers or providing staff development. In practice, this distinction is less clear. The researcher believes instruction to be a result or a product of curriculum. Teachers' decisions about curriculum are also decisions about instruction. Decisions about instruction are related to factors that influence the curriculum. The determination of whether a particular aspect of what is occurring in the classroom is curriculum or instruction is dependent on the reason or purpose for the classroom observation. Areas such as questioning level, activities, materials, teacher-student rapport, choice of methodology can be considered instructional when evaluating the effectiveness of the teacher or program, or they can be considered as curriculum when evaluating teacher decision-making. Considerable overlap and similarity between the two areas may mean that the separation point between curriculum and instruction is dependent on the individual evaluating the classroom.

#### IV. SUMMARY

Although the researcher feels that the methodology was efficient and appropriate and the results of the study accurate, there were weaknesses in the study. Overall there was a lack of substantiation and validation of the classroom observations and analysis of the interview data. There are several changes the researcher would make in the methodology if there was the opportunity to replicate the study. Suggested changes are listed below:

1. Use of video or audio-tape during classroom observations. Recording

of the observation sessions would allow the researcher to review each observation for any activities that may have been overlooked in the actual observation. Recording would also allow for the transcription of teacher questions and comments for future data analysis. Another researcher could also review the taped observations to assist in substantiation and verification of the researcher's findings.

2. Provide greater clarification and definition for the reasons behind the observation and evaluation of areas traditionally believed to be instructional issues (e.g., questioning level, activities, materials).

3. Give increased attention in interviews to areas such as the teacher's IEP development process, philosophy of education, previous teaching experiences, expectations of students, and the reasons behind various curriculum decisions (e.g., questioning level, sources of curriculum content).

4. Use of another researcher to review and analyze teacher interview tapes. A review of the tapes and accompanying analysis would help substantiate and verify the study's findings and conclusions.

The researcher genuinely enjoyed conducting the study and hopes to continue research in the fields of special education curriculum and curriculum deliberation. The study might be replicated in a number of settings and grade levels. Additional research in these areas can only help to improve the quality of special education teachers and programs.

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## Appendix A

### Letters Requesting Permission to Conduct the Study

October 4, 1995

Dr./Mr./Ms.-----, Superintendent  
-----Public Schools  
100 Any Street  
-----, N.C. 27028

Dear Mr./Ms.-----,

I am presently a doctoral student in the field of Administration and Supervision of Special Education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Va. My major area of interest is in the field of special education curriculum. My dissertation topic is "Factors Influencing Curriculum in Elementary Self-contained Special Education Classrooms Serving Students with Educable Mental Retardation".

I am writing to explain my study and to ask your permission to conduct one part of the study in ----- County Public Schools. I will research the role of student, teacher and contextual characteristics on the teacher's decision-making regarding curriculum. I will also examine relationships between these characteristics and the classroom curriculum. All information will be kept confidential and individuals participating in the study will remain anonymous. The research will be conducted in three areas:

1. Review of student records (IEPs, psychological reports, and curriculum materials);
2. Four days of observation over an eight-week period in a self-contained special education classroom predominantly serving students with educable mental retardation classroom;
3. A series of interviews with the classroom teacher and short interviews with the EMR students, the school principal, and the Exceptional Children Program Administrator.

The study proposal has been approved by my Doctoral Dissertation Committee, Dr. Harold McGrady, chairperson, and is currently under review by the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Human Subject Research Division. A letter of support from Dr. McGrady is attached. I will contact you within one week to respond to any questions or concerns you may have about the study and to inquire about your permission for conducting the study in ---- County Public Schools.

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael R. Marcela". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael R. Marcela  
1703 Walnut Drive  
Mt. Airy, N.C. 27030  
(910)-789-0061

October 4, 1995

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, Superintendent  
Public Schools

Dear Dr.

We earnestly seek your permission for Mr. Marcela to conduct his research project in your school system. I can assure you he will proceed in a thoroughly professional manner and will be respectful of the time and schedules of your staff and teachers.

Mr. Marcela has been a teacher of mentally retarded youngsters in North Carolina and is sincere in his desire to learn more about the dynamics of developing curriculum for such students. The research findings will be shared with you in a manner intended to be of assistance to you and your teachers. I will supervise his efforts and monitor the confidentiality and anonymity.

If you have any questions, please call me at (540) 231-9715.

Sincerely,



Harold J. McGrady, Ph.D.  
Professor and Acting Coordinator  
Administration and Supervision  
of Special Education

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Form for Teachers

#### Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

#### Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: "Factors Influencing Curriculum in Self-Contained EMH Classrooms"

Principal Investigator: Michael R. Marcela, Doctoral Student  
Department of Special Education Administration  
Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
College of Education

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR: TEACHERS

##### I. The Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a study about curriculum in the self-contained classroom. The study involves classroom observation, interviews and review of records for the purpose of uncovering the teacher decision-making process toward curriculum, describing the actual curriculum in the classroom, and identifying characteristics which may influence teacher decision-making about curriculum. This study will also involve two other self-contained classrooms in different school divisions..

##### II. Procedures

The procedures to be used in this research are classroom observation, interviews of students, teachers, and administrators, and review of archival records. The time and conditions required for you to participate are:

1. Four interviews with the researcher held over an eight-week period with no interview lasting more than two hours. The first interview shall be structured, using a list of prepared questions. Subsequent interviews will be unstructured, and developed through the observation of the classroom.

2. Teachers are asked to collect a sample of curriculum materials, student work, lesson plans, and similar documents for review by the researcher. Teachers shall also be asked to review and make comments or suggestions concerning a case study summation of their classroom prepared by the researcher at the end of the study.

3. Classroom Observation: Four site visits shall be made to the self-contained EMH classroom over an eight week period (approximately one site visit every other week). Site visits will include classroom observation as well as interviews and record reviews. During each site visit, the researcher shall observe the classroom for at least four thirty-minute instructional periods during instruction involving different curriculum areas (e.g., reading, math, science, social studies, social skills).

### **III. Benefits of this Project**

Your participation in this project will provide the following:

- a. Information about the role of teacher decision-making in development and implementation of curriculum in EMH self-contained classrooms.
- b. Information about the actual curriculum used in self-contained EMH classrooms.
- c. Information about the influence of student, teacher and contextual characteristics on teacher decision-making toward curriculum and the curriculum itself.
- d. Information on student satisfaction with and attitudes toward the curriculum.

You may receive a synopsis or summary of this research when completed. Please provide your mailing address below:

### **IV. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The results of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Due to limited number of EMH self-contained classrooms in small school districts, all participants and their accompanying school divisions and school names will be referred to by subject numbers (e.g., Teacher 1, Student 1, School site 1, School division 1). Names of individuals involved in the study will be not be present in

any written publication related to the study. At no time will the researchers release the results of the study to no one other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

Review of student confidential records (psychological reports and Individualized Education Plan) will only be conducted after receiving written parental permission granting access to such records. Data will be recorded from such records without reference to the individual student's name by use of a subject number. A student's record shall not be reviewed if parental permission is denied or if the parental permission form is not returned.

The interviews will be audio-taped for transcription and analysis. These tapes will only be reviewed by Michael Marcela and will be destroyed at the end of the study. All data collected from record reviews will only be reviewed by Michael Marcela and will be shredded and discarded at the end of the study.

## **V. Approval of Research**

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for projects involving human subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by Dr. Harold McGrady, Acting Chairperson, Department of Special Education Administration, Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, College of Education, and Michael Marcela's Doctoral Committee. Permission to conduct the study has been granted by the superintendent of the participating school division..

## **VI. Subject's Permission**

I have read and understand the informed consent information and conditions of this project. I know of no reason I cannot participate in this study. I have had an opportunity to ask questions concerning the study and have had these questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I should participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I will contact:

Researcher: Michael Marcela

Phone: (910)-789-0061

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Harold McGrady

Phone: (540)-231-9715

IRB Chair: Dr. E. Stout  
Research Division

Phone: (540)-231-6077

**I hereby give my voluntary consent for my participation in this project.**

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent Form for Administrators

#### Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

#### Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: "Factors Influencing Curriculum in Self-Contained EMH Classrooms"

Principal Investigator: Michael R. Marcela, Doctoral Student  
Department of Special Education Administration  
Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
College of Education

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR: ADMINISTRATORS

##### I. The Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a study about curriculum in the self-contained classroom. The study involves classroom observation, interviews and review of records for the purpose of uncovering the teacher decision-making process toward curriculum, describing the actual curriculum in the classroom, and identifying characteristics which may influence teacher decision-making about curriculum. This study will also involve two other self-contained classrooms in different school divisions..

##### II. Procedures

The procedures to be used in this research are classroom observation, interviews of students, teachers, and administrators, and review of archival records. The time and conditions required for you to participate are:

. One interview lasting no more than one hour, conducted during the last site visit. The interview will be audio-taped. Questions for the interview will be from a structured interview protocol.



### **III. Benefits of this Project**

Your participation in this project will provide the following:

- a. Information about the role of teacher decision-making in development and implementation of curriculum in EMH self-contained classrooms.
- b. Information about the actual curriculum used in self-contained EMH classrooms.
- c. Information about the influence of student, teacher and contextual characteristics on teacher decision-making toward curriculum and the curriculum itself.
- d. Information on student satisfaction with and attitudes toward the curriculum.

You may receive a synopsis or summary of this research when completed. Please provide your mailing address below:

### **IV. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The results of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Due to limited number of EMH self-contained classrooms in small school districts, all participants and their accompanying school divisions and school names will be referred to by subject numbers (e.g., Teacher 1, Student 1, School site 1, School division 1). Names of individuals involved in the study will be not be present in any written publication related to the study. At no time will the researchers release the results of the study to no one other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

Review of student confidential records (psychological reports and Individualized Education Plan) will only be conducted after receiving written parental permission granting access to such records. Data will be recorded from such records without reference to the individual student's name by use of a subject number. A student's record shall not be reviewed if parental permission is denied or if the parental permission form is not returned.

The interviews will be audio-taped for transcription and analysis. These tapes will only be reviewed by Michael Marcela and will be destroyed at the end of the study. All data collected from record reviews will only be reviewed by Michael Marcela and will be shredded and discarded at the end of the study.

## **V. Approval of Research**

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for projects involving human subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by Dr. Harold McGrady, Acting Chairperson, Department of Special Education Administration, Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, College of Education, and Michael Marcela's Doctoral Committee. Permission to conduct the study has been granted by the superintendent of the participating school division..

## **VI. Subject's Permission**

I have read and understand the informed consent information and conditions of this project. I know of no reason I cannot participate in this study. I have had an opportunity to ask questions concerning the study and have had these questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I should participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I will contact:

Researcher: Michael Marcela

Phone: (910)-789-0061

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Harold McGrady

Phone: (540)-231-9715

IRB Chair: Dr. E. Stout  
Research Division

Phone: (540)-231-6077

**I hereby give my voluntary consent for my participation in this project.**

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent Form for Parents

**Request for Parental Permission  
for  
Student Participation in Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State  
University Research Study  
and  
Access to Cumulative and Confidential Student Records**

Dear Parents,

My name is Michael Marcela. I am a doctoral student in the area of Special Education Administration at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Blacksburg, Virginia. I am currently beginning my research for my dissertation entitled, "Factors Influencing Curriculum in Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms".

My research involves observing classrooms; interviewing administrators, teachers, and students; and reviewing student records. I hope to obtain information that will help me to describe the curriculum in self-contained classrooms as well as to identify characteristics which influence the teacher's decision-making toward curriculum and the curriculum itself. In order to conduct my research I need your permission to interview your child and to review your child's cumulative and confidential records.

Descriptions of these activities is provided below

#### **I. Student Interviews**

Students will be interviewed one time during an eight-week period. Interviews will be held in small group, informal settings and will last no more than thirty minutes each. Discussions will be limited to information related to what students are being taught, what they have learned and school activities that they enjoy. Students will not be asked to reveal information related to their personal or home lives or situations. Interviews will be audio-taped. Tapes will only be reviewed by Michael Marcela and will be erased, taped over, or destroyed at the end of the study .

## II. Review of Student Records

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the review of student records. Students, school and school division will be referred to only as a subject number (example; Student 1, School 1, School Division 1). No names will be used in any data collection or written reports of the study. Information obtained will include IQ and Adaptive Behavior scores, Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and objectives, mainstreaming information, etc. No records will be reviewed if parental permission is denied or if this consent letter is not returned. All information collected from student records will only be reviewed by Michael Marcela and shall be shredded and discarded at the end of the study..

A copy of the final report of my research will be available to you at your request.

Thank you for considering your child's participation in the study as well as your approval for review of your child's records. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me at (910)-789-0061.

Please check and sign the appropriate choice from the list below and return this form to your child's teacher by: \_\_\_\_\_

-----

## Parental Permission Form

### I. Permission for participation in the study: Check One

\_\_\_\_\_ YES, I give permission for my child, \_\_\_\_\_  
to be interviewed as part of the study described above.

\_\_\_\_\_ NO, I do not give my permission for my child, \_\_\_\_\_  
to be interviewed as part of the study described above.

### II. Permission to access cumulative and confidential student records: Check One

\_\_\_\_\_ YES, I give my permission for Michael Marcela to have access to  
and review my child's cumulative and confidential records in order to obtain  
information for the study described above.

\_\_\_\_\_ NO, I DO NOT give permission for Michael Marcela to have access  
to and review my child's cumulative and confidential records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E

### Informed Consent Form for Students

#### TO BE READ ALOUD TO STUDENTS BY THE RESEARCHER:

Today we are going to talk for about thirty-minutes, a half-hour. I'm going to ask you some questions today and we may meet again next time I'm here to talk about other questions.

My questions are about what you are doing and learning in your class. Only one person should talk at a time. You don't have to answer any question that you don't want to answer. Please try hard not to use your name, any other student's name or your teacher's name when you answer a question. I'm going to tape our conversation so I can listen to it later.

This conversation is "confidential". That means that I won't tell anybody what you or anybody else says. I'm asking you not to tell anybody what you or any other student says here too. Even your teacher won't ask you about our conversation. I'll tape over our conversation after my schoolwork is finished.

Your parents gave permission for me to talk with you. If you still want to take part in our conversation, I'd like you to either give your permission by signing your name on the next page, or sign that you don't want to take part. You don't have to take part if you don't want to. And remember, this is confidential! Do you have any questions

Student Signature Granting Individual Permission to Take Part in Student  
Interviews

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to take part in the interview/conversation with Michael Marcela about what I learn and do in school. I understand all about the interview and understand what the word "confidential" means. I give my voluntary permission to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not wish to take part in the interview/conversation with Michael Marcela. I understand that I do not have to take part if I do not wish to. I understand that nothing will be said or done about me not participating and I am free to return to class.

---

Student name

---

Date

# Appendix F: Data Collection Forms

## Archival Record Review Data Collection Instrument

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom tchr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Grade/age \_\_\_\_\_ Categorical Placement \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Race \_\_\_\_\_  
 School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade range of school \_\_\_\_\_ Class serves: \_\_\_\_\_

IQ SCORES: WISC-R \_\_\_\_\_ ACHIEVEMENT TEST: Woodcock-Johnson \_\_\_\_\_

Age when tested: \_\_\_\_\_ Age when tested: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Grade level when tested: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade level when tested: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Full Scale: \_\_\_\_\_ Broad Reading: \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ gr. level  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Ltr/wd. ID \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ gr. level  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Performance: \_\_\_\_\_ Passage Comp. \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ gr. level  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Broad Math: \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ gr. level  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Verbal: \_\_\_\_\_ Calculation \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ gr. level  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Applied Prob. \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ gr. level  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Broad Wr.Lang. \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ gr. level  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Dictation \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ grade  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Wrtng Samp. \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ grade

OTHER TESTING: \_\_\_\_\_ ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR TESTING: Vineland \_\_\_\_\_

Test measures: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Age when tested: \_\_\_\_\_ Age when tested \_\_\_\_\_  
 Grade level when tested: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade level when tested \_\_\_\_\_  
 Scores: \_\_\_\_\_ Composite: \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ Age lev. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Communic. \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ Age lev. \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Socializ. \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ Age level \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Daily lvng: \_\_\_\_\_ (score) \_\_\_\_\_ Age lev. \_\_\_\_\_



Individualized Education Program (IEP) Review Instrument

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Related Services	Amount per day/week/month	Where provided	Provider
1.	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____

Mainstreaming: % of day/week/month \_\_\_\_\_ Minutes per day/week/month \_\_\_\_\_  
 % of day/week/month in sp. ed. class: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Minutes per day/week/month in sp. ed. class: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Participation in regular classroom for: \_\_\_\_\_

Goals/Objectives

Subject area:	Subject area:
Long-term Obj.: _____	Long-term Obj.: _____
# of goals: _____	# of goals: _____
Eval. methods: _____	Eval. methods: _____
Topics to be studied: _____	Topics to be studied: _____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Goals/Objectives

Subject area: _____ Long-term Obj.: _____	Subject area: _____ Long-term Obj.: _____	Subject area: _____ Long-term Obj.: _____
# of goals: _____ Eval. methods: _____	# of goals: _____ Eval. methods: _____	# of goals: _____ Eval. methods: _____
Topics to be studied: _____ _____ _____	Topics to be studied: _____ _____ _____	Topics to be studied: _____ _____ _____
Subject area: _____ Long-term Obj.: _____	Subject area: _____ Long-term Obj.: _____	Subject area: _____ Long-term Obj.: _____
# of goals: _____ Eval. methods: _____	# of goals: _____ Eval. methods: _____	# of goals: _____ Eval. methods: _____
Topics to be studied: _____ _____ _____	Topics to be studied: _____ _____ _____	Topics to be studied: _____ _____ _____

N.C. Standardized End-of-Grade Testing: \_\_\_\_\_ Exempt \_\_\_\_\_ Takes w/modifications  
Reason(s) for exemption: \_\_\_\_\_  
Modifications: \_\_\_\_\_

Classroom Observation Data Collection Instrument

Page 1

Day: \_\_\_\_\_  
Obser: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher/Class: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
Time: \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm to \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm Subject Area: \_\_\_\_\_ Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

I. Classroom Demographic Information:

- A. Students; Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female B. Racial Diversity. Number of students who are: \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_\_\_ Afro-American \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_ Native American \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Number of students per category in self-contained class: \_\_\_\_\_ LD \_\_\_\_\_ EMH \_\_\_\_\_ BEH \_\_\_\_\_ OHI \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

D. Classroom Seating Arrangement:



ADDITIONAL NOTES OR  
QUESTIONS: \_\_\_\_\_

Page \_\_\_\_\_  
Day: \_\_\_\_\_  
Observ: \_\_\_\_\_

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Student Behavior Management Plan  
Type(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Tied in with Curriculum?  NO  YES, HOW:

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# Of Teaching Assistants: \_\_\_\_\_ How is teaching assistant used:

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Mainstreaming/Inclusion behavior  
Students leaving class: (time and reason)

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Students returning to class: (time and reason)

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r

## Observation Categories and Coding System

**Category: Curriculum Format**  
**Codes:** 1. Regular Education Curr.  
 2. Reg. Ed. Curr. w/modif.  
 3. Parallel Alternate Curr.  
 4. Basic Skills curr.  
 5. Learning strategies Curr.  
 6. Thematic Unit Curriculum  
 7. Lower-grade level Curr.  
 8. Social skills Curriculum  
 9. Independent Living Skills

**Category: Course of Study Source**  
**Codes:** 1. Reg. Ed. Curr./in IEP  
 2. Reg. Ed. Curr./not in IEP  
 3. Lower-grade Cur./in IEP  
 4. Lower-grade Cur./not in IEP  
 5. Other Programs/in IEP  
 6. Other Programs/not in IEP  
    e.g. basic skills, learning  
    strategies, social skills,  
    thematic unit, Ind. living.  
 7. Teacher-developed/in IEP  
 8. Teacher-developed/not in IEP

Adapted from: McLaughlin (1994) &  
 Bigge (1988)

**Category: Level of Questioning**  
**Codes:** 1. Data Recall  
 2. Data process  
 3. Application

From: Shrable, K. and  
 Minnis, L. (1989)

**Category: Lesson Purpose**  
**Codes:** 1. Introduce new mat'l  
 2. Determine prior kuldge  
 3. Review prior lessons  
 4. Drill & Practice  
 5. Prepare for test  
 6. Evaluation-test, quiz  
 7. Administrative routine  
 8. Question/response  
 9. Evaluate baseline/mastery

Adapted from: Flanders in  
 Simon & Boyer, (1974)

**Category: Instructional Activity**  
**Codes:** 1. Teacher-directed  
 2. Student-directed  
    a. lecture/present./demonst.  
    b. audio/visual aids  
    c. guided practice  
    d. independent practice  
    e. discussion  
    f. game  
    g. hands-on/lab  
    h. other

Adapted from: Flanders in Simon &  
 Boyer, (1974)

## Observation Categories and Coding System

## Category: Curriculum Materials

## Codes: 1. Books and printed materials      2. Reference materials      3. Evaluation materials

- a. Regular class text
  - b. Lower-grade text
  - c. Supplementary texts
  - d. Curr. Package books
  - e. workbooks
  - f. reading kits
  - g. newspapers
  - h. magazines
  - i. teacher-made materials
  - j. other
- a. Dictionary
  - b. Atlas
  - c. Encyclopedia
  - d. Other texts
  - e. Computer programs
- a. Practice tests
  - b. Standardized tests
  - c. Teacher-made tests
  - d. textbook tests
  - e. projects
  - f. oral tests
  - g. Curriculum-based

## 4. Flat Graphics

- a. Charts-prepared
- b. Posters
- c. Pictures
- d. Student pictures
- e. Diagrams
- f. Wall maps
- g. Letter sets
- h. Chalkboard
- i. Flannel/magnetic board
- j. Teacher-made mats

## 5. Three-dimensional Media

- a. Globes
- b. Models
- c. Demonstration apparatus
- d. Laboratory equipment
- e. Dioramas
- f. Household objects
- g. Toys, games, puppets
- h. Math manipulatives
- i. sand/water tables

## 6. Audio-Visual Materials

- a. Records/record player
- b. Tapes/tape recorder
- c. Earphones
- d. Radio
- e. TV/VCR and tape
- f. Laser Disc/player
- g. CD and CD player
- h. Computer
- i. Filmstrips
- j. Movie and projector
- k. Opaque projector
- l. slides and projector
- m. Overhead projector

## Appendix G: Structured Teacher Interview Protocol

### Data Collection: Teacher Interview Questions

#### I. Teacher Characteristics

1. Tell me about your educational background (e.g., undergraduate preparation, graduate school, areas of certification.)
2. What was the focus of your teacher preparation program with regard to the organization of curriculum? (e.g., integrated curriculum, basic skills)
3. Have you taught in any other special and regular education settings and/or other school(s) or school districts?
4. What is your favorite subject to teach and why? What is your least favorite subject to teach and why?
5. What teaching strategies (e.g., direct instruction, hands-on activities, worksheets) seem to be most effective with your students? Which strategies are least effective?
6. What is your general experience(s) with mainstreaming students from the self-contained classroom into the regular classroom?
7. Tell me your views about how children best learn and what is the best role for the teacher in their learning?
8. What do you see your students accomplishing "in the future after exiting school?"

#### II. Program Characteristics

9. What are the number of students at different grade levels in your class?  
K \_\_\_ 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
10. Does your school or school division have a written curriculum for self-contained special education classrooms?
11. Does your school or school division have a written policy concerning curriculum for self-contained special education classrooms?



12. Does your school or school district have a long-range plan to develop a standard curriculum for self-contained special education classrooms?

13. Does your school presently have or have long-range plans to implement an inclusion program for special needs students? And does the program or the plans include students in self-contained classrooms?

14. In your opinion, who has the primary responsibility for curriculum development and curriculum decisions for self-contained classrooms in your school/division?

15. Have you been asked to review, describe or explain the curriculum you use in your class to any of the following people?

- a. Superintendent
- b. Sp. Ed Director/Supervisor
- c. Curriculum Director/supervisor
- d. Principal
- e. Assistant principal
- f. Department Chair
- g. Special/Reg. ed. teachers
- h. School Board members
- i. Parents
- j. Outside consultants/advocacy groups

16. Who would you go to for advise or help in developing curriculum for your class? How often has this person been of service to you in curriculum matters?

17. Describe where you get your materials (textbooks, workbooks, etc.) for use in your class?

18. How much money were you able to spend on your class from school funds last year? Were curriculum materials purchased? Describe these items.

19. How much of your own money have you spent on curriculum materials over the past year?

20. How long have you been using your current approach to curriculum in the self-contained classroom?

21. How are special areas such as music, art, P.E., etc. provided to your students?

22. Describe the process you go through when writing an individual student's IEP.

23. In your opinion, what are some of the most effective methods to evaluate your students' progress?

## Appendix H

### Student Interview Questions

1. What are some of the things you have learned this year? What has been your favorite subject? What subject have you not liked?
2. Tell me about your typical day at school--from the time you arrive at school to when the bell rings at the end of the day?
3. What has been the most fun activity you've done all year in your class?
4. What do you use (i.e. , Books, manipulatives, worksheets) to learn about reading?, Math?, Spelling, science, social studies, social skills?
5. Do you take tests in your class? Tell me what they're like. How often do you have tests?
6. Do you have homework to do at night? What is it like? What do you usually have to do?
7. Tell me about the assignments in your class. What are they usually like?
8. Do you go to a "regular" class during the day? When and for what subjects or activities do you go to the regular class?
9. Does your teacher try to include you in deciding what you learn and do in your class, or does she decide everything on her own?

## Appendix I

### Administrator Interview Questions

1. Briefly tell me about your educational background-teacher and administrator preparation and all past teaching and administrative positions.
2. Tell me your perceptions of the EMH self-contained classroom in your school/school district?
3. What should children in an EMH self-contained classroom be taught?
4. What have you observed or what do you usually see going on in the EMH self-contained classroom?
5. Tell me your views about how children best learn and what should be the role of the teacher in that learning?
6. What do you see the EMH self-contained students from your school accomplishing in the future?
7. Does your school/school district have a written curriculum or policy statement, or long range plans to develop one for the EMH self-contained classroom?
8. Does your school/school district now have or plan to implement an inclusion program and does this program include students from the EMH self-contained classroom?
9. Who should have primary responsibility for curriculum development and curriculum decisions for the EMH classroom?
10. Has the EMH self-contained teacher asked you to review or assist her with developing curriculum or curriculum decisions?
11. Describe the materials used and the funding available to purchase curriculum materials for the EMH self-contained classroom?
12. Are you personally involved in IEP development/meetings? Where are the IEPs stored? Does the EMH self-contained classroom teacher review the IEPs often? In your opinion, does the teacher in the EMH self-contained classroom integrate the IEP in the class curriculum?

Appendix J

Pilot Study Superintendent's Letter of Support  
(Attached to Request for Parental Permission Forms)

October 20, 1995

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

Mr. Michael Marcela, a doctoral student at Virginia Tech, is conducting a study designed to enhance the services provided by the public schools to students with special needs. He has requested you and your child's participation in this study.

This letter is to indicate my approval of this study. I believe the results gained will be of benefit to educators in this school district and throughout the state. Please give his invitation to participate serious consideration. Participation by you and your child is completely voluntary.

Please contact Mr. Marcela at (---)----- if you have any questions regarding this matter.

Respectfully yours,

-----  
Superintendent

Appendix K: Pilot Study Data Collection Forms

Archival Record Review Data Collection Instrument

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_ Classroom tchr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Grade/age \_\_\_\_\_ Categorical Placement \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Race \_\_\_\_\_  
 School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade range of school \_\_\_\_\_ Class serves: \_\_\_\_\_

IQ SCORES: WISC-R \_\_\_\_\_ IQ SCORES: Stanford-Binet \_\_\_\_\_

Age when tested: \_\_\_\_\_ Age when tested: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Grade level when tested: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade level when tested: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Scale: \_\_\_\_\_ Test Composite: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Performance: \_\_\_\_\_ Verbal Reasoning: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Verbal: \_\_\_\_\_ Abstract reasoning: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Quantitative reasoning: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Short-term memory: \_\_\_\_\_

IQ SCORES: TEST \_\_\_\_\_ ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_

Age when tested: \_\_\_\_\_ Test/scale: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Grade level when tested: \_\_\_\_\_ Age when tested: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Scores: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade level when tested: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Score(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Review Instrument

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Related Services	Amount per day/week/month	Where provided	Provider
1. _____	_____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____	_____

Mainstreaming: % of day/week/month \_\_\_\_\_ Minutes per day/week/month \_\_\_\_\_  
 % of day/week/month in sp. ed. class: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Minutes per day/week/month in sp. ed. class: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Participation in regular classroom for: \_\_\_\_\_

Goals/Objectives

Subject area: _____	Subject area: _____	Subject area: _____
Long-term Obj.: _____	Long-term Obj.: _____	Long-term Obj.: _____
# of goals: _____	# of goals: _____	# of goals: _____
Eval. methods: _____	Eval. Methods: _____	Eval. methods: _____
Topics to be studied: _____	Topics to be studied: _____	Topics to be studied: _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Goals/Objectives

Subject area: _____ Long-term Obj.: _____	Subject area: _____ Long-term Obj.: _____	Subject area: _____ Long-term Obj.: _____
# of goals: _____ Eval. methods: _____	# of goals: _____ Eval. methods: _____	# of goals: _____ Eval. methods: _____
Topics to be studied: _____ _____ _____ _____	Topics to be studied: _____ _____ _____ _____	Topics to be studied: _____ _____ _____ _____

N.C. Standardized End-of-Grade Testing: \_\_\_\_\_ Exempt \_\_\_\_\_ Takes w/modifications  
Reason(s) for exemption: \_\_\_\_\_  
Modifications: \_\_\_\_\_

Classroom Observation Data Collection Instrument

Teacher/Class: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_  
Time: \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm to \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm Subject Area: \_\_\_\_\_ Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

I. Classroom Demographic Information:

- A. Students; Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female B. Racial Diversity. Number of students who are: \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_ Asian \_\_\_\_\_ Afro-American \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_ Native American \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Number of students served by category in cross-categorical class: \_\_\_\_\_ LD \_\_\_\_\_ EMH \_\_\_\_\_ BEH \_\_\_\_\_ OHI \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
- D. Number of students per handicapping condition of OHI students: \_\_\_\_\_ ADHD/ADD \_\_\_\_\_ Traumatic Brain Injured \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

E. Classroom Seating Arrangement:





ADDITIONAL NOTES or QUESTIONS: \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Student Behavior Management Plan

Type(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Tied in with Curriculum?  NO  YES, HOW: \_\_\_\_\_

# Of Teaching Assistants: \_\_\_\_\_ How is teaching assistant used: \_\_\_\_\_

Mainstreaming/Inclusion behavior

Students leaving class: (time and reason) \_\_\_\_\_

Students returning to class: (time and reason) \_\_\_\_\_

Observation Categories and Coding System

**Category: Curriculum Format**  
**Codes:** 1. Regular Education Curr.  
 2. Reg. Ed. Curr. w/modif.  
 3. Parallel Alternate Curr.  
 4. Basic Skills curr.  
 5. Learning strategies Curr.  
 6. Thematic Unit Curriculum  
 7. Lower-grade level Curr.  
 8. Social skills Curriculum  
 9. Independent Living Skills

**Category: Course of Study Source**  
**Codes:** 1. Reg. Ed. Curr./In IEP  
 2. Reg. Ed. Curr./not in IEP  
 3. Lower-grade Curr./in IEP  
 4. Lower-grade Curr./not in IEP  
 5. Other Programs/in IEP  
 6. Other Programs/not in IEP  
     e.g. basic skills, learning  
     strategies, social skills,  
     thematic unit, Ind. living.  
 7. Teacher-developed/in IEP  
 8. Teacher-developed/not in IEP

**Category: Level of Questioning**  
**Codes:** 1. Data Recall  
 2. Data process  
 3. Application

From: Shrable, K. and Minnis, D.(1969)

Adapted from: McLaughlin (1994) & Bigge (1988)

**Category: Lesson Purpose**  
**Codes:** 1. Introduce new mat'l  
 2. Determine prior knldge  
 3. Review prior lessons  
 4. Drill & Practice  
 5. Prepare for test  
 6. Evaluation-test,quiz  
 7. Administrative routine  
 8. Other/none of above

**Category: Instructional Activity**  
**Codes:** 1. Teacher-directed  
 2. Student-directed  
 a. lecture/present./demonst.  
 b. audio/visual aide  
 c. guided practice  
 d. independent practice  
 e. discussion  
 f. game  
 g. hands-on/lab  
 h. other

**Category: Topic change decisions**  
**Codes:** 1. Tchr. changes topic  
 2. Tchr postpones change  
 3. Tchr ignores request  
 4. Tchr chooses not to address request

Adapted from: Flanders in Simon & Boyer, (1974)

Adapted from: Flanders in Simon & Boyer, (1974)

Observation Categories and Coding System

Category: Curriculum Materials

Codes: 1. Books and printed materials

- a. Regular class text
- b. Lower-grade text
- c. Supplementary texts
- d. Curr. Package books
- e. workbooks
- f. reading kits
- g. newspapers
- h. magazines
- i. teacher-made materials
- j. other

2. Reference materials

- a. Dictionary
- b. Atlas
- c. Encyclopedia
- d. Other texts
- e. Computer programs

3. Evaluation materials

- a. Practice tests
- b. Standardized tests
- c. Teacher-made tests
- d. textbook tests
- e. projects
- f. oral tests
- g. Curriculum-based

4. Flat Graphics

- a. Charts-prepared
- b. Posters
- c. Pictures
- d. Student pictures
- e. Diagrams
- f. Wall maps
- g. Letter sets
- h. Chalkboard
- i. Flannel/magnetic board
- j. Teacher-made mat'ls

5. Three-dimensional Media

- a. Globes
- b. Models
- c. Demonstration apparatus
- d. Laboratory equipment
- e. Dioramas
- f. Household objects
- g. Toys, games, puppets
- h. Math manipulatives
- i. sand/water tables

6. Audio-Visual Materials

- a. Records/record player
- b. Tapes/tape recorder
- c. Earphones
- d. Radio
- e. TV/VCR and tape
- f. Laser Disc/player
- g. CD and CD player
- h. Computer
- i. Filmstrips
- j. Movie and projector
- k. Opaque projector
- l. slides and projector
- m. Overhead projector

Adapted from: Herbert, J., (1967).

## Appendix L

### Pilot Study Classroom Site Report

The pilot study was conducted in a small school system in Northwest North Carolina. Observations, interviews and record reviews were made on Tuesday, October 31, Thursday, November 2, and Tuesday, November 7, 1995.

#### I. OBTAINING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE PILOT STUDY

Prior to the implementation of the pilot study, the researcher met three times with the school district superintendent. Although approval was given to conduct the study at the first meeting, the superintendent required the researcher to develop forms indicating permission for adult participants to take part in the study as well as forms for parents to indicate permission for the researcher to access their child's confidential records and to include their child in interviews. These forms were accepted at the second meeting and forwarded to the school system attorney for review. Final acceptance of the forms was granted at the third meeting. The superintendent also developed a letter of support for the research to be attached to parental permission forms to facilitate participation.

Parental permission forms were distributed to the classroom teacher and sent home with students on Monday, October 23, 1995, with a notation to be returned by Friday, October 27, 1995. Of the ten forms sent, nine forms were returned with six parents granting permission.

#### II. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION.

The Average Daily Membership (ADM) of the school district was reported as 2,000 students. There were four schools in the district, two elementary

schools, a junior high school and one high school. The school division employed one Exceptional Children Program Administrator.

The individual school in which the pilot study was conducted served approximately 600 students in grades K-6. With regard to special education services, the school housed a resource program for students with learning disabilities and mild mental retardation (75 students), a speech and language program (75 students), and a self-contained classroom for students with educable mental retardation and students with behavioral-emotional handicaps (eleven students.)

The classroom involved in the pilot study served eleven students: eight students with educable mentally retardation and three students with behavioral-emotional handicaps. The class served students in grades from second grade through sixth, ages seven through thirteen. Although primarily a self-contained classroom, students began the day in a regular classroom homeroom and then came to the self-contained class. Students were mainstreamed for non-instructional areas such as lunch and assemblies as well as for special curricular areas such as music, art, physical education, computer lab, foreign language (Spanish) and guidance. There was one teacher and one full-time assistant in the classroom, one part-time assistant during the morning hours and a third assistant who worked with students for a short time in the afternoon. Student demographic information is listed in Table 1.

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Appendix Table 1.  
Pilot Study: Student Demographic Information.

Class diversity	Number of Students: 11		By Category: 8 EMH, 3 BEH	
	Gender: Males: 6 Females: 5		Race: All Caucasian	
	Grades: 2nd (1), 3rd (1), 4th (4), 5th (1), 6th (4).			
	Grade Range School: K-6			
Student IQ:	Median: 65	Mean: 60	Range 40-68	N=4

(table continues)

Appendix Table 1.  
Pilot Study: Student Demographic Information.

Achievement Level-	Range: (Woodcock-Johnson) Broad Math: K.6--1.5	Broad Reading: EMH: K.4--1.6 Broad Written Language: Pre-K--1.6
Adaptive Behavior:	(Vineland) N=2	Scores: Composite: 2.9, 3.8

Note: EMH = Educable Mentally Handicapped, BEH = Behaviorally Emotionally Handicapped, K = Kindergarten, IQ = Intelligence Quotient.

### III. IEP INFORMATION

Student IEPs were very detailed and comprehensive. IEPs for the students with educable mental retardation listed goals for communication skills, math, social studies, science and behavioral needs. The IEPs for students with behavioral emotional handicaps were much more detailed and included numerous objectives related to specific inappropriate behaviors to be corrected. Amount of mainstreaming was similar for all students. IEP Information is denoted in Table 2.

Appendix Table 2.  
Pilot Study: IEP Information:

Related Services:	Speech: 1 student: Once per month
Mainstreaming:	5.8 hours or 21% per week in the regular classroom 21.7 hours or 79% per week in the Self-cont'd classroom
Regular class participation	Library, Music, Art, lunch, P.E., Assemblies, Computers, Spanish, D.A.R.E. (6th Grade)
Goals/Objectives:	Major Areas Addressed: Reading, Math, Social Studies, Handwriting, Spelling, Science, Behavior, Speech (1)
Mean number of objectives	Reading (4), Math (5), Science (3), Speech, (4) Social Studies, (2), Handwriting/Spelling (4), Behavior (3)

#### Topics of Study in the IEP:

- Reading: sight words, phonics, reading sentences, speed, fluency, reading and listening comprehension
- Math: addition, subtraction, multiplication (1), telling time, money, measurement
- Science: animals, habitats, plants and flowers, basic hygiene, weather

(table continues)

Appendix Table 2.  
Pilot Study: IEP Information.

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Topics of Study continued

Social Studies: continents, community workers

Handwriting/Spelling: manuscript, cursive, chalkboard copying, writing sentences, spell 3-7 words per week

Behavior: Second Step Social Skills, Improve Behaviors, ADHD modifications

Speech: opposites (1st gr. level), unvoiced and voiced "th", "thr" sound

---

Evaluation methods: student demonstration, Brigrance Tests, flashcards, assignments, teacher observation, tests (oral, written, True/False), behavior management records

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Note: P.E. = Physical Education, D.A.R.E. = Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education, IEP = Individualized Education Program, ADHD = Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, 1st = first, gr. = grade.

Discussion. The teacher in the pilot study classroom instructed students primarily in the areas of language arts and mathematics. Each morning the students participated in a group lesson, met in small reading groups, and completed seatwork in areas such as spelling and handwriting. The teacher instructed the large group and smaller reading group sessions, and teacher assistants worked with students on their individual seatwork.

The afternoon was dedicated to completing unfinished morning work, free time, and rewards for appropriate behavior during the day. Lesson plans and student interviews revealed that science and social studies were also taught in the afternoon, although inconsistently.

#### IV. THE CURRICULUM IN THE PILOT STUDY CLASSROOM.

The curriculum in the class was organized in a basic skills format for in language arts areas such as grammar, and spelling. Lower-grade level curriculum formats were used in reading groups, mathematics, and for a science unit. Scope and sequence of units in all areas were developed by the teacher, or followed the sequence outlined in lower-grade levels texts and materials.



Topics in large and small group instruction as well as with individual seatwork included areas such as phonics, recognizing long and short vowel sounds in the medial position, identifying nouns, cursive handwriting of the letters "X" and "W" for two older students, and alphabetical order. Mathematics topics of instruction included identifying and copying patterns, counting, beginning addition and subtraction, and subtraction involving "borrowing". Topics of instruction in reading groups centered on reading and listening comprehension, decoding skills, sight-word vocabulary, reading speed, and fluency. All topics of instruction observed in reading, math, and science were present in student IEPs with the exception of nouns and alphabetical order. Although included on the IEP, instruction in social studies and science was not observed and was reported to be taught infrequently..

Materials used in the classroom included teacher-made materials, worksheets from packaged curricula, old, lower-grade level reading and mathematics texts, and workbooks. Books, reading kits, and math materials were predominately discarded materials from various grade levels. Material was presented primarily on the chalkboard. The teacher did use a variety of materials in her small reading and handwriting groups such as records and tapes, and picture cards. The Math Their Way curriculum and materials were used for the two youngest students in the classroom to develop basic math concepts.

The curriculum presented was consistently teacher-directed. Lecture, demonstration, and presentation were used most often with some use of teacher-supervised guided and independent practice. Instances in which the curriculum became student-directed occurred primarily in the afternoon when students worked independently or with minimal assistance. Lessons tended to be centered around review of prior information and for drill and practice activities. New material was presented most often in spelling and reading groups and in one instance to teach a Touch-math group lesson. Consistent with the above

approaches, questions asked of the students were primarily of low-level data recall in nature. The teacher assistant was used to complete administrative tasks such as attendance, complete whole group instruction when the teacher had to take a phone call and mostly for one-on-one assistance to students on assignments.

Student interviews were conducted on the last two days of site visits. Information from the interviews was consistent with and substantiated information provided by the teacher and observations by the researcher.

Appendix Table 3.  
Pilot Study: Description of the Curriculum.

Characteristic	Description of the Curriculum Characteristic
Curriculum Format	Language Arts: Basic Skills Reading Groups: Lower-grade level curricula Math: Lower-grade level (texts/materials for older students), <u>Math Their Way</u> for younger students Science: Lower-grade level For one BEH student: Regular Class Social Studies Curriculum
Curriculum Source	Lower-grade level texts or kits Teacher-developed based on content of IEPs Regular classroom (for one BEH student)
Questioning Level	Data Recall level in all areas
Lesson Purpose	Most often to review previous material or for drill and practice To introduce new material in: spelling, reading, and grammar To determine prior knowledge in reading
Instructional Activities	Teacher-directed: lecture, presentation, demonstration, supervision of guided and independent practice Student-directed: Independent practice
Materials used	Student pictures, teacher-made materials, worksheets, chalkboard, records, prepared charts, lower-grade texts, math manipulatives, pictures, reading kits, computer

(table continues)

Appendix Table 3.  
Pilot Study: Description of the Curriculum

Topics studied:

Reading: phonics (long/short vowels), rhyming words, comprehension, identifying nouns, alphabetical order, decoding words, listening comprehension.  
 Math: Patterning, counting, subtraction w/regrouping, addition  
 Handwriting: Cursive writing letters: "E", "J", "P", "X", "W"  
 Social Studies: Finding information in a newspaper.

Note: BEH = Behaviorally emotionally handicapped, IEP = Individualized Education Program

**V. INFLUENCES ON TEACHER DECISION-MAKING**

The various influences on the pilot study teacher's decision-making was determined through use of a structured interview format for the first observation and a semi-structured format for all subsequent interviews. Questions used in semi-structured interviews were developed from classroom observation sessions. Table 4 describes how the fifty-seven questions related to the independent and dependent variables.

Appendix Table 4.  
Pilot Study: Type, Focus and Number of Teacher Interview Questions

Question type	Student Char.	Teacher Char.	Contextual Char.	Curriculum	
Structured	1	11	11	2	
Semi-structured	7	15	4	6	
Total:	57	8	26	15	8

Note: Char. = characteristics

**A. Student Characteristics**

Student characteristics most often cited as being considerations in the teacher's curriculum decisions are listed in Table 5

Appendix Table 5.  
 Pilot Study: Influence of Student Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making

Character.	Determined by:	Influence on TDM	Influence on Curriculum
Achievement level	14/57 questions (24.5%)	Tchr considers char. when planning curr.	Influences curriculum through tchr decisions
EMH behaviors	8/57 questions (14%)	Tchr considers when planning	Influences curriculum through TDM
Student IQ	2/57 questions (3.5%)	Tchr considered IQ when planning curr. at beginning of year	Influences curriculum through TDM when initially planning
The IEP	1/57 questions (1.8%) Observation	Influences curriculum through TDM	IEP is the basis for curr. in Communication and Math skills.
Student Desire	1/57 questions (1.7%)	Minor influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM.

Note: Character. = characteristics, TDM = Teacher decision-making, curr. = curriculum, Tchr. = teacher, EMH = educable mentally handicapepd, IQ = intelligence quotient, char. = characteristic, IEP = Individualized Education Program.

**Discussion:** The teacher identified student functioning level either by observation or other assessments, then developed curricula and instructional strategies to teach content beginning at the student's level of functioning. She used techniques that address the negative behavioral characteristics of her students such as poor retention, high distractibility, short attention spans and difficulty working independently.

### **B. Teacher Characteristics**

Factors mentioned most often by the teacher or observed to have an influence on the teacher's decision-making about curriculum or on the curriculum itself are listed in Table 6.

Appendix Table 6.  
 Pilot Study: Influence of Teacher Characteristics of Teacher Decision-Making.

Characteristics	Determined by:	Influence on TDM	Influence on the Curr.
Perception of student learning needs.	11/57 questions (19.3%)	Strong influence in TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Perception of what students need to know in the future.	7/57 questions (12.28%)	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Beliefs about the best way to teach EMH students.	6/57 questions or 10.53%	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Previous teaching experiences.	Observation	Influence on TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Focus of teacher preparation program.	Observation	Influences TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM
Personal subject matter teaching preferences	Observation	Influences TDM	Influences curriculum through TDM

Note: TDM = Teacher decision-making, curr. = curriculum, EMH = educable mentally handicapped.

**Discussion:** The teacher has definite beliefs about what is most important for students to learn and what they will need in the future. She combines these beliefs with her belief about the best way to teach EMH students; using small group and one-on-one instruction with a structured, strict discipline program. Observations and interviews revealed that the teacher organizes her curriculum for EMH students very similar to the organization of her previous BEH curriculum (minus attention given to science, social studies or health areas) and to the focus of her teacher preparation program. Lastly, the teacher specified her preference in teaching reading and her dislike for math and social studies. The curriculum is

likewise very strong and focused on teaching reading and very weak in the area of social studies. Math is taught significantly though and this may be due to the teacher's belief in math as a learning priority, need and prerequisite for success in future settings.

### C. Contextual Characteristics

There are several factors that are present in the school district, school or classroom that influence the teacher's decision-making about the curriculum as well as having a direct influence on the curriculum. These characteristics are listed in Table 7.

Appendix Table 7.

Pilot Study: Influence of Contextual Characteristics on Teacher Decision-Making

Contextual Char.	Determined by:	Infl. on TDM	Infl. on Curr.
Lack of appropriate materials	12/57 questions (21.0%)	Influence on TDM	Direct influence on the curr.
Lack of guidance developing curriculum	7/57 questions (12.28%)	Tchr relies on own beliefs & suggestions	Direct influence on curr.
Participation in inclusion program	4/57 questions (7.01%)	Dictates to tchr what content to teach	Direct influence on curriculum
Use of commercial curriculum	3/57 questions (5.26%)	Provides tchr with main curr. decisions	Direct influence on curr.
Number of students in the class	2/57 questions (3.5%)	Influences decisions related to grouping.	Influences curr. through TDM
Holidays	Observation	Influence on TDM	Influences curr. through TDM

Note: Inf. = influence, curr. = curriculum, TDM = teacher decision-making, tchr. = teacher.

**Discussion:** The teacher's curriculum is heavily influenced by the fact that she must use discarded materials or anything she can "beg, borrow or steal". With regular classroom textbooks or teacher guides not being available

for her class, the teacher must pick and choose from a variety of older texts, kits and programs. The teacher also expressed frustration at teaching EMH students without having prior experience or training to teach such students and not knowing what to do or teach. She believes the primary responsibility for curriculum development for the EMH class should rest with the Exceptional Children's Program Director and/or the Director of Curriculum, yet neither of these individuals have been of much assistance to her this year. The teacher received all of her curriculum support and assistance from the principal, the assistant principal, another special education teacher and the guidance counselor.

The participation of two students in an inclusion program for sixth-grade required the teacher to teach social studies, science and health using the standard course of study. She stated that although the class is not too large, a smaller number of students in the class would facilitate more one-on-one instruction. Lastly, due to Halloween, many of her activities and materials were selected with Halloween themes in mind.

Administrator interviews substantiated information obtained from both observations and teacher interviews. Main areas of discrepancies were expectations of ability of EMH students and beliefs about who is responsible for curriculum development in the classroom.

## VI. SUMMARY

The self-contained classroom serving predominately EMH students has undergone many changes this year. With the combination of BEH students, the departure of some previously served EMH students and the change of teacher, the curriculum is currently in a state of transition and development. The curriculum as observed in the classroom is the creation of the teacher and as

such is largely influenced by characteristics inherent in the teacher (i.e., beliefs, experience, preparation, likes and dislikes). Student characteristics such as ability level, idiosyncratic behaviors and IQ also weigh heavily in the teacher's decision-making toward the curriculum. Although primarily developed from the influence of these characteristics, several contextual characteristics have a direct influence on the curriculum by dictating to the teacher what to teach and by limiting her sphere of decision-making ability.



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### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, Mt. Airy, N.C. (March, 1996-Present) Teacher of students with educable mental retardation and learning disabilities in a resource room setting.

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE and STATE UNIVERSITY, Blacksburg, VA. (June, 1995-December, 1995). Graduate Assistant for Department of Administration and Supervision of Special Education.

B.H. THARRINGTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, Mt. Airy, N.C. (October, 1990-June, 1995). Teacher of the students with educable mentally retardation in a self-contained classroom setting.

PATRICK COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL, Stuart, VA. (August, 1988-October, 1990). Teacher of the students with trainable mentally retardation in a self-contained setting.

SOUTH PARK HIGH SCHOOL, Winston-Salem, N.C. (January, 1985-June, 1988). In-school suspension teacher.

### PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (Ed.D). (May, 1996) Doctorate degree in Administration/Supervision of Special Education. VPI & SU, Blacksburg, VA.

DISSERTATION: "Factors Influencing Curriculum in Elementary Self-Contained Special Education Classrooms."

## **INTERNSHIPS:**

**Special Education Administration. Wythe County Public Schools, Wytheville, VA. under the Supervision of Dr. Melinda Robinet (Special Education Director) and Dr. Philip Jones (VPI & SU). June-August, 1994.**

**Public School Administration. B.H. Tharrington Elementary School, Mt. Airy, under the supervision of Mr. Gary Chandler/Mr. Mike Hiatt, (Principals) and Dr. Dave Parks (VPI & SU.) August, 1993-June, 1994.**

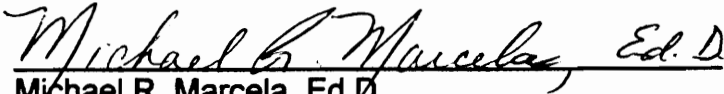
**MASTER OF ARTS (M.A.) (May, 1988). Master of Arts degree in Special Education. Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C.**

**BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A.) (May, 1984). Bachelor of Arts degree in Intermediate Education and Psychology. Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, N.C.**

## **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

**EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER, Surry-Yadkin Residential Services, Inc. (November, 1993-present). Board is responsible for overseeing operation of six group homes for mentally handicapped adults.**

**ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER, Surry Friends of Youth Special Friends Program. (January, 1990-Present). Board initially developed the Special Friends Program and oversees in operation through Surry Friends of Youth.**

  
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