SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENT PARTICIPATION AT THE IEP CONFERENCE WITHIN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of special education teachers regarding parent participation during the IEP conference. More specifically, teachers' perceptions of parent participation during the IEP conference, previous training, as well as specific training needs as it relates to the special education teachers' role in facilitating the IEP conference were explored. Additionally, teacher perceptions of recommendations to rectify poor parent participation during the IEP conference within inclusive education were assessed.

METHOD. To achieve the purpose of this study, the researcher designed a Likert-type questionnaire. The population involved in this study was comprised of special education teachers from an intermediate school district in Southeast Michigan, who are participating in inclusive education.Subsequent to administrative and school board approval, the researcher collected completed

questionnaires at the close of a special education meeting in person to enhance the return rate. Data obtained from the questionnaires were presented via percentages.

Findings. 1. Special education teachers perceive that parents are not active and equal participants at the IEP conference. Parents do not participate in the decision making and writing of the IEP. 2. While special education teachers have received some training, there are missing components or "gaps" in specific areas of teacher training which are equally critical to effectively working with parents, communicating, and facilitating the IEP conference. 3.Special education teachers perceive a need for teacher training in all skill areas relevant to working with parents, communicating, and skills pertaining to the special education teachers' role as conference facilitator. 4.Special education teachers generally perceive that inclusive education has positively impacted the IEP process. While teachers perceive that inclusive education could be the juncture to improving the IEP process, teacher training is perceived as a more effective means to improve parent participation at the IEP conference.

Conclusion 1.The issue of poor parent participation at the IEP conference has yet to be ameliorated and prevails within inclusive education. 2. Special education teachers lack

training in specific skill areas related to their role as IEP conference facilitator within inclusive education, and recognize that teacher training is needed to enhance parent participation at the IEP conference. 3. The inclusive education reform movement provides a good opportunity to make needed changes in IEP conference procedures.

DEDICATION

To my children, Taylor and Alison.

May you both internalize and apply the virtues of hard work and perseverance, as they relate to your goals in life.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The passage of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and subsequent amendments, not only symbolizes a significant step in equal and appropriate educational opportunities for all handicapped children, it serves as an impetus for direct parental involvement in the education of their exceptional child (Frank & Ehly, 1983). The outcome of this legislation dramatically reconceptualized the role of parents in the educational process to that of program participant and partner (Vaughn, Bos, Harrell & Lasky, 1988). The act and its associated procedural regulations mandate parental participation in the development of their child's individualized education plan (IEP).

While the enactment of this law was hailed as a marked advancement in forming an effective parent/professional alliance in educational planning, the literature is replete with studies revealing descriptions of parent participation at the IEP conference (IEPC) as more fiction than fact (Goldstein,Strickland, Turnbull and Curry, 1980; Scanlon, Arick & Phelps,1981; Vaughn, et al.,1988). Although parents

are legally entitled to participate in the development of their child's IEP, many parent prefer a passive role of merely giving and receiving information to that of actively contributing to decisions regarding their child's IEP (Yoshida & Gotlieb, 1977; Lusthanus, Lusthanus & Gibbs, 1981; Leyser & Cole, 1984; Scanlon, Arick & Phelps, 1985). Many school personnel feel that parents should participate only to the extent of providing information to the planning team, rather than being actively involved in educational planning for their handicapped child (Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull & Curry, 1980; Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman & Maxwell, 1978). Too often these conferences have been meaningless encounters with little emphasis on the communication process (Peary, 1981).

The last decade has been a period of reexamination of the intent, goals and procedures of not only the IEP process, but the special education delivery system as well. The call for reform of conventional special education services is referred to as inclusive education. Inclusive education aims to facilitate new partnerships with general and special education to accomodate the needs of all students within the regular classroom environment. By consolidating all educational offerings, all students, whether they be disabled, gifted, or average, will be

provided with an appropriate education within one unified system (Stainback & Stainback, 1984 & 1992; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Semmel, Abernathy, Butera & Lesar, 1991).

Strangly absent from the literature is information regarding the IEPC in light of inclusive education. Beyond the matter of extending the IEP provision to all students, there is little mention of how inclusive education will impact the IEPC process. Additionally, there is no discussion of ameliorating the known issue of low parent participation during the IEPC in the wake of inclusive education. Within the inclusive education debate, important facets of the IEP process have been ignored as an integral part of this initiative (Smith, 1990).

The rapid and widespread rush to embrace inclusive education without sufficient critical appraisal of various facets of this initiative have been questioned (Coates 1984; Leiberman, 1985, 1992; Smith, 1990). While inclusive education could set the stage for achieving the true intent of P.L. 94-142 (now refered to as P.L.101-476; Individuals with Disabilities Act, IDEA, 1990),there is agreement within the educational community that policy questions and operational issues relevant to inclusive education are lacking in clarity and definition. Until the debate regarding parent participation during the IEPC is

renewed, participants of the IEPC will continue to minimally achieve the true intent of the IEP provision of P.L.101-476.

The literature clearly reveals that the IEP provision of P.L. 101-476 has fallen short of its intent. While educators and parents claim to support the philosophy of an equal partnership in educational planning, the research indicates that neither are fully implementing and fostering an effective parent/professional alliance during the IEPC. To the degree that parents are passive participants during the IEPC, and that teachers are unclear that parental involvement and input is a goal of the conference, it appears that the IEP process may lead to as many problems as it was designed to solve.

In the wake of rapid and widespread changes in the delivery of special education services via inclusive education, the IEP provision of P.L.101-476 has received minimal attention in the literature. There is little information regarding the potential impact of inclusive education on the IEP process. Additionally,there is no evidence of any discussion or efforts to ameliorate documented problems afflicting the IEPC in light of the reform movement (Smith, 1990).

While inclusive education could set the stage for

achieving the true intent of P.L.101-476, reform can not occur in one area and not another. More information regarding the IEPC procedure in light of inclusive education must be generated. Analysis of the current IEPC as well as the future direction of the IEP process is needed. Such data may serve to not only effectively implement the extensive changes proposed by inclusive education, it may serve to rectify the documented problems associated with poor parent participation during the IEPC.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The enactment of inclusive education may be premature without adequately ascertaining the ideas and attitudes of those individuals who ultimately implement the IEP component of this initiative (Coates, 1989). Information regarding the IEP process must be obtained from those individuals who facilitate the IEPC.Special education teachers' perceptions must be assessed regarding their perception of parent participation during the IEPC within inclusive education. Teachers' perceptions regarding specific training needs relevant to parent participation during the IEPC must be assessed. Additionally, teachers' perceptions regarding conceivable modifications relevant to the future course of the IEPC in light of inclusive education must be examined in order to acquire the

essential data to build a solid foundation for truly effective change. In general, the fundamental details of the IEP provision of inclusive education have not been addressed. To date, the call for this information has yet to be researched.

Data relevant to the IEPC in light of inclusive education will aid in the effort to achieve the spirit of cooperative educational planning between parents and teachers during the IEPC, as well as to provide important insights regarding operational issues of inclusive education. In response to the continued call for research on the IEPC, as well as inclusive education, the problem of this study was the lack of information from teachers regarding parent participation during the IEPC in light of inclusive education.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of special education teachers regarding parent participation during the IEPC within inclusive education. To accomplish this, the following research questions were addressed in this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do special education teachers perceive parent participation during the IEPC within inclusive education?

2. What training have special education teachers received in specific skill areas relevant to their role in facilitating the IEPC?

3. What are special education teachers' training needs regarding their role in facilitating the IEPC within inclusive education?

4. What are special education teachers' perceptions regarding modifications/changes in the IEPC conducted within inclusive education?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms serve for both descriptive and operational purposes in this study.

IEP: A written statement for each handicapped child developed in any meeting by a representative of the local education agency or an intermediate educational unit who shall be qualified to provide, or supervise the provision

of specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of handicapped children,the teacher, the parents or guardian of such child, and, whenever appropriate, such child, which statement shall include (A) a statement of the present level of educational performance of such child, (B) a statement of annual goals, including short-term instructional objectives, (C) a statement of the specific educational services to be provided to such child, and the extent to which such child will be able to participate in regular educational programs, (D) the projected data for for initiation and anticipated duration of such services, and (E) appropriate objective criteria and evaluation procedures and schedules for determining, on at least an annual basis, whether instructional objectives are being achieved (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, Public Law 101-476, 20 U.S.C 1400 et seq.(1990).

PARENT PARTICIPATION: The degree to which parents contribute, take part in, or share in the decision making process and writing of their child's IEP, during the IEP conference (IEPC).

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: The provision of educational services for students with disabilities, in schools where non-handicapped peers attend, in age appropriate general education classes under the direct supervision of general

education teachers, with special education support and assistance as determined appropriate through the individualized education program (IEP) committee. (Michigan Department of Education, State Board of education, February 1992).

PERCEPTION : The result or product of perceiving. A single unified awareness derived from sensory processes while a stimulus is present. Having or showing insight, understanding or intuition (The Random House College Dictionary, Random House).

ASSUMPTIONS

The design of this study was based on the following premises: (1) It was assumed that personnel in the local education agency in which this study was conducted were complying with Federal and State law and regulations pertaining to the education of childen with disabilities. (2) It was assumed that the special education teachers in the local education agency would participate in the study.

DELIMITATIONS

The following were delimitations of this research study:

1. This study was delimited to a local education agency in Southeastern Michigan.

2. The population for this study was delimited to special education teachers (representative of all handicapping conditions).
3. The information obtained from this study was delimited to the survey instrument.

JUSTIFICATION

While inclusive education could set the stage for achieving the true intent of P.L.101-476, most agree that policy questions and operational issues of this initiative are lacking in clarity and definition. In the wake of rapid and widespread changes proposed via inclusive education, the IEP provision has received little attention. More information regarding the IEPC in light of inclusive education must be obtained for truly effective change. It is anticipated that information obtained from this study may serve to not only effectively implement the extensive changes in special education delivery of services as proposed by inclusive education, it would serve to ameliorate the documented concern of poor parent participation during the IEPC. The results of this study may be of value to those authorities at the state and local education levels, as well as to local education agencies and higher educational institutions, who are concerned with the implementation of P.L.101-476.

ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

All literature relevant to special education teachers perceptions of parent participation during the IEPC in light of inclusive education will be presented in chapter two. The research methods will be presented in chapter three. The findings of this study will be presented in chapter four. Conclusions and recommendations will be presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, a review of the literature relevant to special education teachers' perceptions of parent participation at the IEPC within inclusive education is presented. The theoretical framework of parent participation in the IEP process is explored. An analysis of the roles and responsibilities of IEPC participants is detailed. Research studies related to parent perception of the IEPC are examined. In addition, teacher training as it pertains to their role at the IEPC is studied. The final portion of this review examines inclusive education and the IEPC.

THEORETICAL BASIS FOR PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN THE IEPC

The literature provides perspectives on the theoretical basis for Congress mandating parental participation at the IEPC in P.L.101-476. In general, parents are to advise the schools as they participate in the proper placement and instructional program for their

child. According to Northcott and Fowler (1976), when parents are actively involved with professionals, three processes occur: the parent and professionals exchange information; the parents are encouraged to grow in their role; and a trusting, productive relationship between parents and teachers is built. Klein (1980) claimed that the IEP is the focal point for resolving differences between parents and the school. Active parent participation via the IEPC will result in collaborative decision making and educational planning, resulting in the "home-school team effort" so often advocated (Yoshida and Gottlieb, 1977).

OBSERVATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE IEPC

Much of the research related to to the IEP process focused on the role and responsibilities of conference participants during the IEPC. Data from the literature suggest a consistent pattern of engagement between participants at the IEPC. The interchange during the IEPC is dominated by special education teachers, while parents and other related professionals in attendance (school psychologist, principal, school social worker, regular

education teacher) assume a passive role. The communicative interaction observed reveals a one way flow of information-giving statements from special education teachers to other individuals in attendance.

Researchers have examined the verbal interaction among conference participants through observational analysis of initial and annual IEP conferences. Analysis of 47 IEPCs (Vacc, Vallecorsa, Parker, Bonner, Lester, Richardson, Yates, and Greensboro, 1985) revealed that parents and special education teachers accounted for more speaking citations (signifying active and passive participation) than any other participant, however, a major difference concerning the nature of their participation was noted. The special education teacher was considerably more active (e.g. talking) than all other individuals present. Also, the majority of citations recorded for parents were passive (e.g. head nodding) in nature. Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, and Lasky (1988) observed initial IEPCs to measure the amount of interaction among conference participants, rendering similar findings. Observational analysis of parental comments, questions and responses were recorded.

Observational data suggest that the majority of parents asked relatively few questions and responded little during the conferences.

Similar studies exploring the communicative interaction during the IEPC support these findings. Studies conducted by Turnbull and Hughes (1987), and Goldstein et al., (1980) found that parents initiated a small number of comments, responses, and asked few questions during the IEPC. (Neither specified whether the conferences examined were initial or annual IEPCs.) In a breakdown of speaking citations of participants in attendance, Goldstein et al. (1980) observed the special education teacher talking twice as much as parents, as well as other conference participants. According to Turnbull and Hughes (1986), the communicative interaction for 47 speech and language conferences observed was predominately one-way, with clinicians (special education teachers who provide speech/language services and facilitates speech/language IEPCs) providing information to parents and other conference participants. A ten year follow-up study conducted by Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, and Lansky (1988) revealed strikingly similar results to that of the

aforementioned studies, indicating that ten years after the implementation of P.L. 101-476, the intent of the law endures, yet change has yet to occur.

Research reveals that some professionals do not adequately understand their function at the IEPC, and also suggests that the low level of participation by parents is due to their lack of understanding of the IEP process. The discrepant participation of parents and professionals at the IEPC indicates that the role and responsibilities of conference participants may not be clearly defined, as demonstrated by studies investigating the working relationships and communicative engagement during the IEPC.

Vacc et al. (1985) suggest that the domination by the special education teacher did not occur by design, but because they do not know how to invite the contributions of others. Analysis of data by Turnbull and Hughes (1986) revealed that the less the clinician spoke during the speech and language IEPCs, the more the other participants spoke, creating more communicative interaction and exchange of ideas. Vacc et al. (1985), and Leyser (1985) content that some special education teachers do not adequately

understand their function at the IEPC. Vacc et al. (1985) also point out that some professionals (other than the special education teacher) may feel that they fulfill their responsibilities during conference discussions and further participation by them is unnecessary. The passive participation of parents and other professionals indicated that roles and responsibilities of these members are not clearly defined (Goldstein et al., 1986).

Unfortunately, specific procedures followed for many conferences inhibited active and equal participation by committee members (Turnbull and Hughes, 1987; Vacc et al.,1985;Goldstein et al., 1980). For example, instead of conferences being devoted to developing IEP goals and objectives jointly between between parents and educators, conference participants were presented with an IEP document previously written by the special education teacher (Goldstein et al., 1980; Turnbull and Leonard, 1980; Vacc et al., 1985; Meyers and Blancher, 1987). Another problem cited is the composition of the IEPCs which are not in compliance with Federal guidelines for appropriate membership (Goldstein et al., 1980; Scanlon, Arick, and

Phelps, 1981; Vacc et al., 1985; Singer and Butler, 1987; Smith, 1990). Mandated personnel such as the representative of the local education agency (e.g., principal, or supervisor of special education), and a professional in addition to the special education teacher qualified to interpret test results and assess data for parents are often absent from the IEPC. Additionally, school districts devote little time and effort to informing parents of their rights and responsibilities regarding the IEPC. Vacc et al. (1985) point out that the reason for conducting the IEPC is not being met when key participants are not directly involved, or when essential topics are overlooked.

TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

Although the impetus for a parent/professional alliance in educational planning has been established by Federal statutes, this collaboration is largely dependent upon the preparation of those individuals involved in the IEPC. According to this legislation, state education agencies (SEAs) are mandated to submit a state plan for teacher training that is in accordance with the purposes of P.L.94-142. Described under "State Plans", section 613 (3)

reads as follows:

> Set forth, consistent with the purposes of this act, a description of programs and procedures for the development and implementation of a comprehensive system of personnel development which shall include the inservice training of general and special educational instructional and support personnel, detailed procedures to assure that all personnel necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained, and effective procedures for aquiring and disseminating to teachers and administrators of programs for handicapped children significant information derived from educational research, demonstration, and similar projects.(P.L.94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Nov.29,1975, U.S Code, Sec 618(A)).

The educational community has long recognized the need to prepare parents and school personnel for their role and responsibilities during the IEPC. However, a review of the literature reveals insufficient training and guidance for IEPC participants.

The research cites some intervention strategies and inservice training programs to generate meaningful parent participation during the IEPC. Switzer (1985) and Nazzaro (1979) developed and implemented parent training programs that emphasized parents' rights and responsibilities, in addition to development of the active decision-making and communication skills needed to interact effectively with professionals. Brinkerhoff and Vincent (1986) developed a training package for both parents and school staff with the

purpose of increasing parent participation at IEPCs. The results of the study indicated that when both parents and school personnel receive some training, parent participation increased.

Various training programs have been effective in preparing parents and teachers for the IEP process. However, little has been done to provide teacher training pertaining specifically to effective communication skills and strategies to facilitate parent involvement in the IEPC. In spite of the continued call for teacher training in fostering parent participation at the IEPC, this skill area has only been addressed peripherally within the educational community. No evidence of teacher training geared exclusively to the educators' role in facilitating parent participation was found on the inservice level, and little on the preservice level.

Many graduates of teacher training institutions are not receiving training in the competencies they require to perform their job (Lyon, 1988; Smith 1990). Kroth and Simpson (1977) point out that teachers receive little or no training in communicating with parents during their preservice years. A survey of undergraduate students

conducted by Price (1980) reveals that parent conferences are regarded as one of the most anxiety-provoking aspects of their future jobs. Bensky, Shaw, Gouse, Bates, Dixon and Beene (1980) contend that there may be a relationship between the lack of training in working with parents and the degree of stress for teachers. A survey of 154 colleges and universities granting bachelor's and master's degrees in special education showed that one third of the special education departments do not offer a specific course in working with parents, while of those that do, one third have not made the course a requirement (Hughes et al.,1987). Faculty from institutions of higher education recognize the lack of specific coursework devoted to working with parents, but due to specific restrictions from institutional as well as state certification requirements for graduation, the topic is not considered a high priority in the training curricula (McLaughlin, Valdivieso, Spence and Fuller; 1988).

An additional factor inhibiting communication between conference participants is the lack of training in the dynamics of a multidisciplinary team approach, and group decision-making.

Methods used in training special education and ancillary professionals fail to address the dynamics of group process and basic interpersonal communication skills (Fleming and Fleming, 1983; Moore, Fifield, Spira, Scarloto, 1989; Smith, 1990). There is no systematic training for school personnel in working with groups and facilitating team participation. According to Smith (1990), without adequate training in group process and decision making, school personnel lack the skills necessary to ensure proper functioning of the IEP committee.

In addition to a lack of preservice preparation, teachers receive limited training and guidance from local education agencies (LEA) regarding the IEP process. LEAs determine policies for teachers to follow in order to comply with the mandates related to the IEP process. However, Frank and Ehly (1983) point out that they do little to prepare teachers to effectively develop and foster parent participation during the IEPC.

Most training programs available for teachers focus primarily on procedural mandates of the IEP process, to include such topics as due process, administrative concerns, preparation of written reports, and/or IEP

planning (Knight, 1980; Gillis and Ladella, 1984; Gold and Spivak, 1983; White, 1983). Vautour and Rucker (1977) developed a modular multimedia package for school personnel, presenting a systematic approach to operating IEPCs. Only one of the six modules addresses strategies for ensuring that parents are aware of their rights, and are involved in all decisions related to their children. While the educational community recognizes the need for professional preparation that extends beyond the legal mandates of the law, little had been done to provide inservice training devoted soley to developing communication skills and strategies for ensuring meaningful parent participation during the IEPC.

In addition to inadequate preservice and inservice training, the regulations themselves provide minimal guidance to teachers regarding their role in facilitating parent participation at the IEPC. The concept of parent participation in P.L.101-476 is vague. The law spells out a a process to follow for developing the IEP document and securing parental consent, but it does not provide a means by which educators should structure parental involvement in educational planning (Frank and Ehly, 1983). Turnbull and

Hughes (1986) claim that Federal statutes stipulate inclusion of parents in the planning process, however, the specific role and the extent of influence parents should have during this joint planning conference is undefined.

In a study conducted to identify teachers' perceptions of their responsibilities during the IEPC, Fenton, Yoshida, Maxwell, and Kaufman (1979) reported that 79% of the professionals were either unaware or unclear that communication with parents was a goal of interdisciplinary teams. White and Calhoun (1987) found that teachers are concerned with "covering themselves", and that obtaining acceptance of the IEP via parent signature was considered a priority. Parent involvement is accepted and fostered to the degree necessary to get the signature (White and Calhoun, 1987).

Subsequent to a 1978 study assessing teacher attitudes toward the IEP requirement, Morgan and Rhodes (1983) resurveyed special education teachers to determine any perceptable change in teachers' attitudes. The data from both the 1978 and 1983 studies were consistent with similar studies conducted (Nadler and Shore, 1980; Safer, Morrisey,

Kaufman, and Lewis, 1978). In general, the findings indicate that while teachers dislike the procedural and clerical aspects of the IEPC, they generally find merit in the IEP process. According to the authors, teachers feel the benefits of the IEP process outweigh the negative aspects. Results indicate that IEPs help teachers to organize their time and that development and implementation of IEPs result in greater job satisfaction. Additionally, there was a positive relationship between teacher attitudes toward the IEP process and the amount of support received in the development and implementation of the IEP. Teachers receiving support from regular education teachers and parents reported a more positive attitude toward the IEP process.

IEPC AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

While the statute has been effective in bringing parents and educators together via the IEP process, the anticipated partnership between parents and teachers has yet to transpire. Examination of actual IEPCs reveal verbal interactions between parents and teachers that do not foster an equal partnership in educational planning. Inappropriate procedures and inadequate knowledge of the

IEP process have interfered with the intended collaborative effort in educational decision making. Rotter and Robinson (1982) point out that merely placing parents and teachers in the same room does not guarentee a fruitful experience.

The last decade has been a time of reexamination of the intent, goals, and procedures of not only the IEP process, but the special education delivery system as well. Special education is recognized for its impact on the advances in educational opportunities for handicapped individuals. While this legislation established previously unserved students rights to a free and appropriate education, many feel that school systems have yet to achieve the intent of P.L.101-476. According to Gartner and Lipsky (1987 & 1992), these programs have failed both to overcome the separation between general and special education and to make the separate system significant in terms of student benefit. The research indicates that the conventional structure of special education, particularly those for moderately/mildly handicapped, cannot be justified. Will (1986b) documents fragmented educational educational approaches and problems with a dual system as

negative features of conventional special education programs. Excessive rules and regulations inherent in the system decrease school efficiency, minimize communication and continuity, and increase administrative costs (Wang, Reynolds and Walberg, 1985).

While inclusive education is not mandated by the Federal government, it is an attempt to protect the civil rights of disabled children within the educational domain. The initiative is, to some extent, a "grassroots" movement on the part of the educational community and parents to desegregate children with disabilities back into the general education program, and to dispel the "disabled" stigma. Proponents of inclusive education feel that this movement is not only in accordance with the law, but an attempt to carry out the letter and spirit of the law to the fullest extent.

The inclusive education movement has been festering for years, generating a great deal of controversy and discussion. An overview of the issues surrounding inclusive education are presented in the literature. Much of the research focuses on the basic assumptions that underlie inclusive education. Various approaches and models geared

approaches and models geared to accomodate a broader range of student difference in the regular classroom are presented, along with discussion and analysis of the pros and cons of such reform. Whether for or against the philosophy and/or execution of inclusive education, a mutual goal for handicapped students prevails amidst this debate; that is for all handicapped students to receive an equal and appropriate education from qualified educators in the least restrictive environment.

While the majority of research advocates the advancement of inclusive education, many call for more extensive study before inclusive education gains momentum. These authors raise a number of questions that they feel should be addressed prior to any widespread changes in the current system. For example, educational researchers are uneasy with the lack of data reflecting the views of school personnel regarding inclusive education (Pugach, 1987; Huefner, 1988; Fuchs and Fuchs, 1988; Coates, 1989; Trent, 1989). There is concern that this initiative is being advanced without input from those who would ultimately implement and facilitate the reform movement.

In an attempt to "add to the emerging database" on

educator's attitudes toward inclusive education, Davis and Maheady (1991) surveyed regular and special educators, as well as principals, in the state of Michigan. The study measured educators' agreement with inclusive education goals and proposed methods for implementation. In addition, respondents identified "technical assistance needs" (e.g. inservice training, consultation) for executing the reform movement. The data gathered indicated that educational professionals are not as adverse to the overall goals of inclusive education, as was previously reported (Leiberman, 1985). Additionally, respondents who were in agreement with the fundamental goals of inclusive education tended to agree with proposed strategies for implementation. The study also revealed that most educators surveyed believed that pragmatic factors such as time for planning, existing regulations, and funding were the greatest inhibitors to successful implementation. And finally, most educators indicated a need for technical assistance for effective inclusive education development. The authors viewed areas of agreement as valid starting points in educators collaborative efforts via inclusive education, and points

of disagreement as a signal to proceed with caution (Davis and Maheady, 1991).

The national debate surrounding inclusive education provides a wide spectrum of opinion and suggestions for program implementation. It is clear that there is no consensus about how to design and enact an effective model. For example, questions regarding the issue of inclusion and determining those students most appropriately served in the regular classroom continue (Jenkins et al., 1990). Additionally, the future direction of the IEP process as it relates to inclusive education is also uncertain. In general, the proposed policy changes have potentially far reaching effect not only for all students, but for the general and special education service provider as well.

Within the inclusive education discussion, many topics, rationals, and cautions are addressed; yet the IEP is ignored as an important part of the initiative (Smith, 1990). Questions about whether or not the IEP will be extended to all students within inclusive education is briefly discussed. In light of the potentially changing roles of special and general educators, there is no mention of what effect inclusive education will have on IEPC

procedures, as well as the potential change in the role/responsibilities of educators and parents in the design, implementation and monitoring of the IEP.

Advocates of inclusive education propose that the IEP provision of P.L.101-476 be extended to students without disabilties. According to Stainback and Stainback (1984), the IEP should not be limited to exceptional students. In keeping with the intent of inclusive education, Reynolds et al. (1987) recommends that the IEP provision be extended to all students to avoid the problem of having to specify particular labeling of students to which such rights pertain. In general, tailor made instructional programs (IEPs) should be provided to all students whether considered bright, minority, disabled, or average. The emphasis would shift from classification and eligibility to instructional assessment and program planning (Stainbach and Stainback, 1984; Reynolds et al.,1987; Semmel et al., 1991).

Semmel et al. (1991) surveyed a small sample of regular and special education teachers to assess perceptions relative to the salient components of inclusive education. Contrary to Will (1986) and others' position on extending

IEPs to all students, teachers surveyed did not believe that IEPs could be developed and utilized effectively in the classroom. These findings are consistent with a study assessing regular education teachers' perceptions of inclusive education. Semmel (1991) surmised from the data that teachers support the right of students with mild disabilities to an education in the regular classroom, and agree to an IEP for such students. However, they are not comfortable with extending the IEP provision to students without disabilities. In conclusion, it is clear that a discrepancy exists between policy makers and service providers regarding the issue of extending the IEP provision to all students.

Beyond the matter of extending the IEP provision to all students, the literature is vague regarding the various components of the IEP process relative to inclusive education. More specifically, there is no discussion of who will facilitate the IEP process: who will participate in the IEPC, or who will monitor the document subsequent to its development. The fundamental details of the IEP provision have not been addressed in the research pertaining to inclusive education.

The past decade has been a period of question and change in the special education delivery system. The merging of general and special education into a unified system has been unfolding for years. Advocates of inclusive education see the movement as a means to achieving absolute equal and appropriate educational opportunities for all students. While inclusive education could set the stage for attaining the true intent of P.L.101-476, most agree that policy questions and operational issues of this initiative must be addressed.

While there is disagreement regarding the fundamentals of inclusive education, there is widespread agreement that more studies and analysis are necessary before successful implementation of the reform movement. The literature is repleat with recommendations to guide inclusive education, yet the research is lacking in specifics (Trent, 1989). According to Jenkins et al. (1990), inclusive education is in many respects without definition.

The research calls for more studies designed to clarify, define and validate the purpose and nature of inclusive education. Researchers maintain that little empirically oriented attention has been focused on the

views of potential service providers and facilitators of change (Davis and Maheady, 1991; Semmel et al., 1991; Lieberman, 1985 & 1992). Key constituencies have not been adequately considered regarding inclusive education (Kauffman, 1989). If the service providers do not contribute and participate in the design and development of educational reform, they are unlikely to endorse or effectively execute the initiative.

SUMMARY

The passage of P.L.94-142, and subsequent amendments, not only symbolize a significant step in equal and appropriate educational opportunities for all disabled children, they dramatically reconceptualized the role of parents in the educational process to that of program and partner via the IEP provision. While the enactment of this law was hailed as an advancement in establishing a parent/professional alliance in educational planning, the literature is repleat with studies revealing that both parties approach the IEPC with a poor understanding of the roles and responsibilities of each conference participant. Not only do parents have a poor understanding of their

rights or function at the IEPC, they prefer a passive role of giving and receiving information to that of actively contributing to decisions regarding their child's educational program.

According to the literature, teachers may not be aware that communication is the goal of the IEPC. Teachers carry out the concept of parent participation to the extent of narrowly complying with the procedural manadates of the law, but not to the extent of fully carrying out the purpose of the IEP provision. Too often these conferences have been meaningless encounters with little emphasis on the communication process (Peary, 1981).

The last decade has been a period of reexamination of the intent, goals, and procedures of not only the IEP process, but the special education delivery system as well. The call for reform, referred to as inclusive education, aims to facilitate new partnerships with general and special education to accomodate diverse groups of students within the regular classroom environment. In short, by consolidating all educational offerings into one unified system, any one student, whether he/she be disabled, gifted, or average, would have access to any of the

classes, individualized tutoring, support personnel, and material adaptations now offered in special and/or general education (Stainback and Stainback, 1984).

Strangly absent from the literature is information on the IEPC in light of inclusive education. Beyond the matter of extending the IEP provision to all students, there is no mention of who will facilitate the IEPC, who will participate in the development of the IEP document, or who will monitor the document subsequent to its development. In general, there is no discussion of what impact inclusive education will have on the IEPC procedures as well as the potential changing role and responsibilities of educators and parents in the design, implemenation and monitoring of the IEP process.

While inclusive education could set the stage for acheiving the true intent of P.L.101-476, most agree that policy questions and operational issues of this initiative are lacking in clarity and definition. The rapid and widespread rush to embrace inclusive education with little critical appraisal of various facets is being questioned (Coates, 1984). There is agreement within the educational

community that more studies and analysis, parrticularly focused on the perceptions of those individuals who would be the service providers of this initiative, be conducted (Coates, 1984).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

While inclusive education could set the stage for achieving the intent of P.L.101-476, most agree that policy questions and operational issues of this initiative lack clarity and definition. The literature calls for more research to delineate the underlying facets of inclusive education. For example, more information regarding current IEP procedures, as well as the future direction of IEP conference (IEPC) in light of inclusive education must be obtained. The data gathered must be from those individuals who facilitate the IEPC. The perceptions of IEP service providers can be utilized as a foundation for developing strategies to ameliorate documented problems afflicting the current IEPC process, and to guide the future course of the IEP process in light of inclusive education.

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of special education teachers relative to the IEPC. More specifically, teachers' perceptions of parent participation during the IEPC, specific training needs, as well as recommendations to rectify the problem of poor parent participation at the IEPC within inclusive education were measured from a suburban school district in southeastern Michigan.

It was anticipated that the information from this study would provide relevant data in the continued effort to rectify known factors inhibiting the intent of the IEP provision of P.L.101-476. The data from this study might also serve to contribute important input from the IEPC service providers within inclusive education.

POPULATION

The population involved in this study was comprised of special education teachers from an Intermediate School District located in southern Michigan, approximately 70 miles west of Detroit. Its more than 300 employees provide varied educational services to local educators who serve the more than 27,000 students in the 12 local school districts and twelve non-public schools. For the 3,000 students in the County with identified disabilities, the special education division of the intermediate school district supports the local education agencies with a broad continuum of instructional and support services as determined by the individualized education planning committee.

The population involved in this study was comprised of 97 full-time and three part-time special education personnel. The population includes professionals with diversified educational credentials and professional

experience representative of the broad continuum of special education instruction and support services provided through the County intermediate school district.

INSTUMENTATION

The instrument utilized to collect data was a questionnaire. After extensive investigation, no evidence of an instrument to assess special education teachers' perceptions relevant to the IEP component of inclusive education was found in the literature. Therefore, the instrument for this study was developed by the researcher. The pre-design of the questionnaire reflected the extant literature on the IEPC, special education teacher training relative to the IEPC, the inclusive education reform movement, as well as the researchers professional experience in the IEP process.

The questionnaire is comprised of three sections, each pertaining to the research questions driving this study. The first section entails 19 statement items relevant to parent participation at the IEPC within inclusive education. These statements were based on the extant literature specific to the special education teacher's role in facilitating parent participation during the IEPC, parent participation in the decision making process and writing of the IEP, as well as parents communicative interaction during the IEPC. Respondents were asked to

indicate the extent to which they agree with each statement item. The response mode was as follows: 4 (strongly disagree), 3 (disagree), 2 (agree), and 1(strongly agree).

The second section of the questionnaire consists of 20 statement items regarding professional training and the special education teachers' role in working with parents, communication, and facilitating the IEPC. In this section, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they have received training in the above areas. The response mode was as follows: 4 (much training), 3 (some training), 2 (little training), 1 (no training). In section two, the respondents were also asked to indicate the degree to which they perceive that training in the aformentioned areas is needed for special education teachers to enhance parent participation at the IEPC. The response mode was as follows: 4 (great need), 3(some need), 2 (little need), and 1 (no need).

The third and final section of the questionnaire consists of 14 statement items relevant to the IEPC procedures in light of inclusive education. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement regarding potential modification or changes in the IEPC procedures in light of inclusive education. The response mode was as follows: 4 (strongly disagree), 3 (disagree), 2 (agree),

and 1 (strongly agree).

The questionnaire was pilot tested on a representative sample of special education teachers. Appropriate changes in the instrument were made, based on the special education teachers' responses and comments regarding statement items, format and clarity. Content validity was determined by the research committee's evaluation and judgement of the instrument. Relative to individual committee member's input, items were added, modified or deleted to produce a clear instrument.

DATA COLLECTION

The questionnaire was utilized to collect data from those special education teachers employed by the County Intermediate School District. Prior to data collection, the researcher obtainined Board of Education approval to conduct the study. The researcher arranged with the Director of Special Education to distribute the questionnaire to special education personnel during a staff inservice/meeting. The questionnaire was accompanied with a cover letter comprised of the following: identification of the researcher, an explanation of purpose, and a statement ensuring confidentiality.

Upon completion, the special education teachers were instructed to submit the questionnaires directly to the

researcher to enhance the return rate. Of the 100 questionnaires distributed, 87 were returned to the researcher. Five additional completed questionnaires were submitted to the special education director, and subsequently mailed to the researcher, producing a total return rate of 92%.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data obtained from the returned questionnaires were reported and analyzed in Chapter Four. Data were treated with descriptive analysis procedures. The results of the survey were tabulated by recording the responses on a master data sheet. The data were appropriately arranged for each research question, and are presented by percentages in narrative and tabular form, which summarize the responses.

For purposes of comparison, the data were presented in a dicotomous fashion by grouping agree/strongly agree responses, as well as disagree/strongly disagree responses for data relevant to research questions one and four. Data relevant to research question two were presented dicotomously by grouping no training/little training and some training/much training. Questionnaire items relevant to research question three were presented dicotomously by grouping much need/some need and little need/no need responses.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to assess teachers' perceptions regarding parent participation during the IEP conference (IEPC). More specifically, special education teachers' perceptions of: (1) parent participation during the IEPC, (2) prior teacher training, (3) specific teacher training needs, and (4) modifications in the IEPC procedure within inclusive education were measured.

Pursuant to information relative to the future course of the IEPC in light of inclusive education, the researcher surveyed special education teachers from a County Intermediate School District in Southern Michigan. The population involved in this study was comprised of 97 full-time and three part-time special education personnel. The population includes professionals with diversified educational credentials and professional experience representative of the broad continuum of special education instruction and support services provided throughout the school district. Of the 100 questionnaires distributed, 92 were returned producing a total return rate of 92%. The data from the questionnaire were tabulated and

appropriately arranged for each research question.

Sixty-two percent of the respondents provided the demographic data requested. Of those 57 teachers, 41 are female; 16 are male. Forty-eight teachers have earned a masters degree. Three hold a doctorate in education. Forty-six of the respondents are certified in general education. The average number of years teaching is 14, and the average number of years in special education is 15.

The research questions and associated findings are presented in this chapter. The data are described by percentages in narrative and tabular form. For purposes of comparison, the data have been presented in a dichotomous fashion by grouping agreed/strongly agreed responses as well as disagreed/strongly disagreed survey responses.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF PARENT PARTICIPATION AT THE IEPC

The first research question addresses special education teachers' perceptions of parent participation in the IEPC.

Reseach question #1

How do special education teachers perceive parent participation during the IEPC?

The findings which address this research question follows. For clarity, the data pertaining to research question one were clustered and presented in three sections, each of

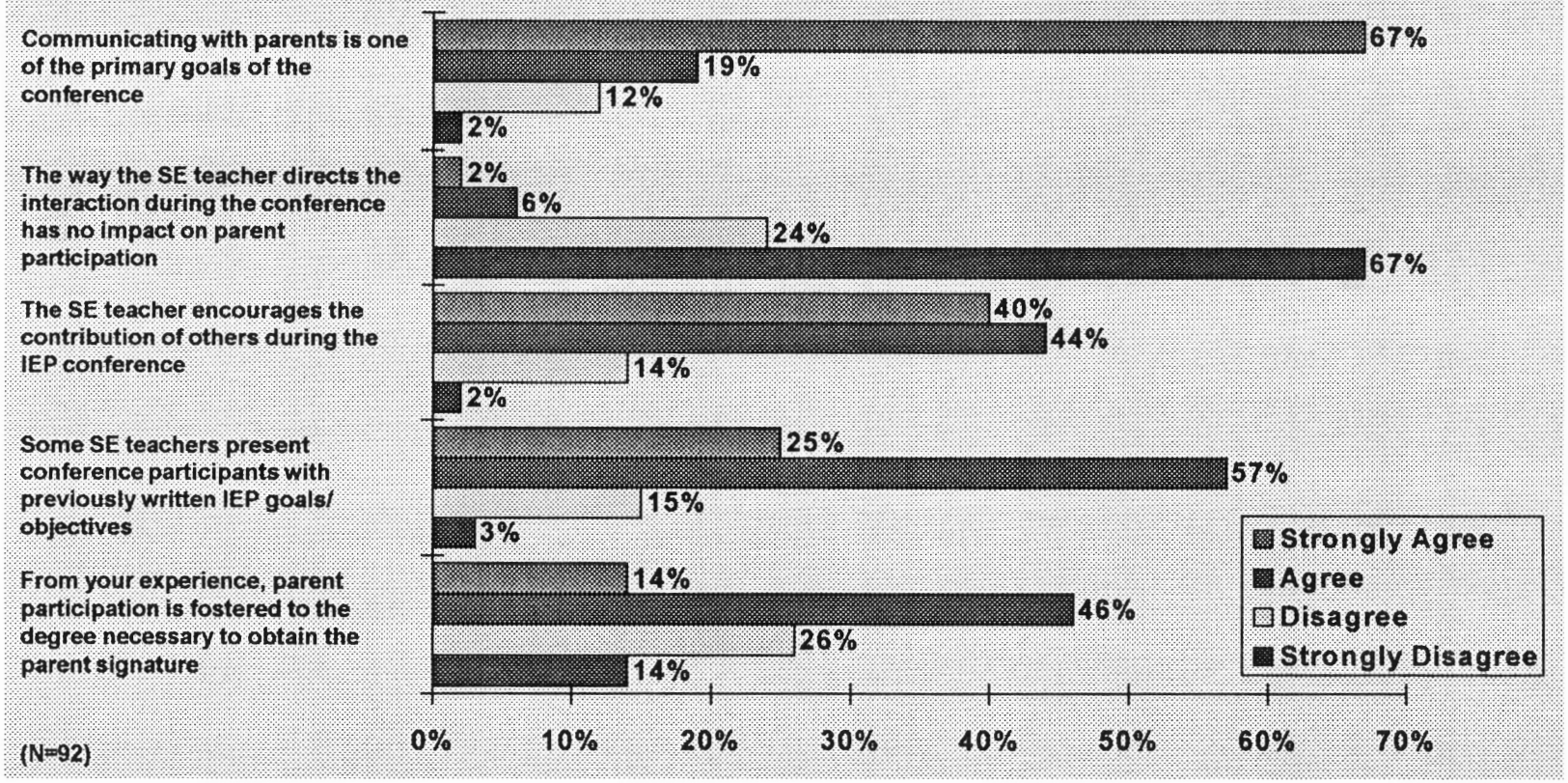
which are relevant to parent participation during the IEPC. The first section presents data relevant to the special education teachers' role in facilitating parent participation during the IEPC. The second section addresses parent participation in the decision making process and writing of the IEP. The third and final section presents parent participation relevant to parents communicative interaction during the IEPC.

Teachers' Role as Conference Facilitator

The following represent the first section of data pertaining to research question one: teachers' perceptions of the special education teachers role in facilitating parent participation at the IEPC. These findings are represented in TABLE 1. The data gathered indicate that most teachers (86%) surveyed agreed (19%) or strongly agreed (67%) that communicating with parents is one of the primary goals of the IEPC. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the teachers strongly agreed that the way the special education teacher directs the interaction during the conference does impact parent participation. Additionally, 84% either agreed (44%) or strongly agreed (40%) that the special education teacher does encourage the contributions of others during the IEPC. In general, special education teachers positively perceive all aspects of their role as

TABLE 1

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role In Facilitating Parent Participation During the IEP Conference



(N=92)

conference facilitator.

When asked about specific behaviors/techniques related to facilitating the IEPC, most teachers (82%) either agreed (25%) or strongly agreed (57%) that teachers present conference participants with previously written IEP goals/objectives. Furthermore, a majority of respondents (60%) either agreed (46%) or strongly agreed (14%) that parent participation at the IEPC is fostered to the degree necessary to obtain the parent signature.

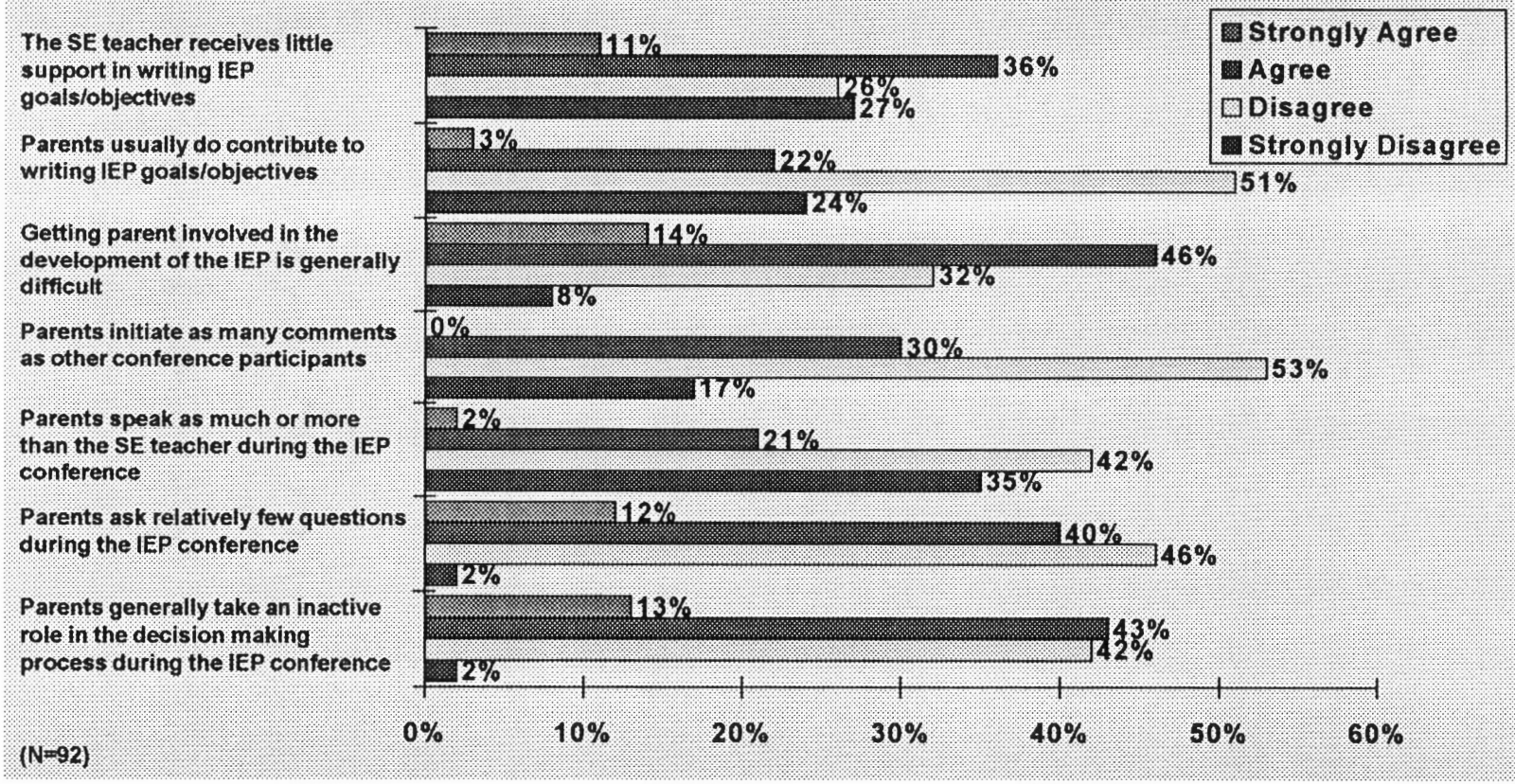
Based on the findings, special education teachers theoretically support the concept of parent participation at the IEPC. However, the way in which they facilitate the conference is contrary to communicating with parents and encouraging parent participation.

Parent Participation in Writing the IEP

The following represent the second section of data pertaining to research question one; parent participation in the decision making process and writing of the IEP document. These findings are represented in TABLE 2. Slightly more than half (53%) of the respondents disagreed (26%) or strongly disagreed (27%) that the special education teacher receives little support in writing IEP goals/objectives. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the special education teachers disagreed (51%) or strongly disagreed

TABLE 2

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Parent Participation In the Decision Making Process and Writing of the IEP Conference



(N=92)

(24%) that parents usually do contribute to writing IEP goals/objectives. More than half (60%) agreed (46%) or strongly agreed (14%) that getting parents involved in the development the IEP is generally difficult.

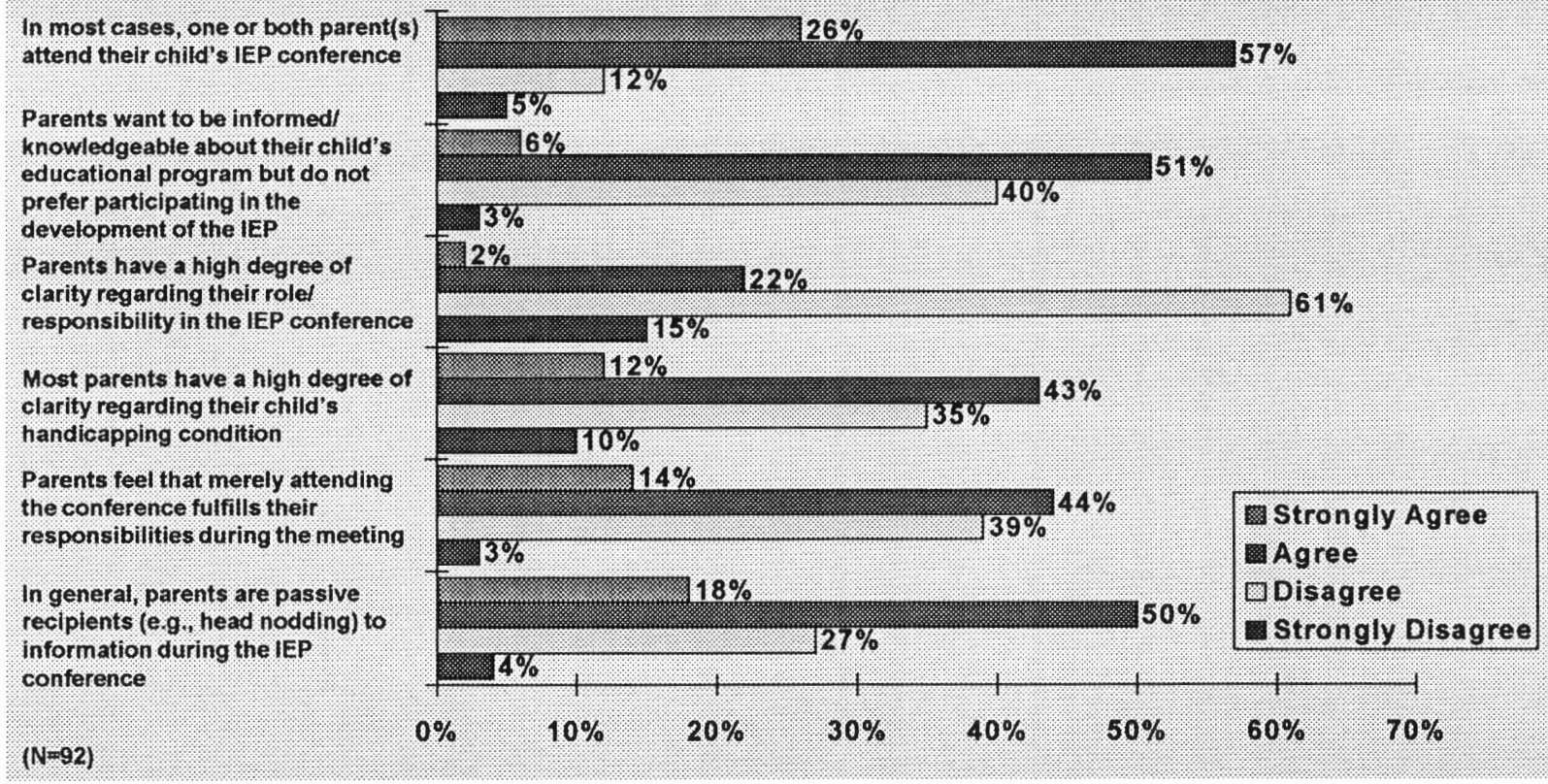
A majority of special education teachers (70%) either disagreed (53%) or strongly disagreed (17%) that parents initiate as many comments as other conference participants. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the teachers disagreed (42%) or strongly disagreed (35%) that parents speak as much or more than the special education teacher during the IEPC. Slightly more than half (52%) of the respondents agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (12%) that parents ask relatively few questions during the IEPC. And finally, 56% of the special education teachers agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (13%) that parents generally take an inactive role in the decision making process during the IEPC.

Parents' Communicative Interaction

The following represent the third section of data pertaining to research question one: parent participation relevant to the parents communicative interaction during the IEP conference. These findings are represented in TABLE 3. Of the special education teachers surveyed, 83% agreed (57%) or strongly agreed (26%) that in most cases, one or both parents attend their childs IEP conference. Less than

TABLE 3

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Parent Communicative Interaction During the IEP Conference



(N=92)

half of the professionals (41%) agreed (38%) or strongly agreed (3%) that while parents want to be informed/knowledgable about their child's educational program, they do not prefer participating in the writing of the IEP document. Most teachers (76%) disagreed (61%) or strongly disagreed (15%) that parents have a high degree of clarity regarding their role/responsibility in the IEPC. Slightly more than half (55%) of the respondents agreed (43%) or strongly agreed (12%) that most parents have a high degree of clarity regarding their child's handicapping condition. More special education teachers (58%) agreed (44%) or strongly agreed (14%) that by merely attending the IEP conference, parents feel they fufill their responsibilities during the meeting. And finally, 68% of the professionals surveyed agreed (50%) or strongly agreed (18%) that in general, parents are passive recipients (i.e.head nodding) to information during the IEPC.

SUMMARY

After reviewing the data relevant to research question one, the following summary of how special education teachers perceive parent participation during the IEP conference within inclusive education can be made.

The majority of special education teachers feel that communicating with parents is one of the primary goals of

the IEP conference, and that their role as conference facilitator does effect parent participation. Teachers perceive that they encourage the contribution of others during the IEPC. In general, special education teachers agree with the intent of the IEP process, however, their techniques in achieving it (e.g. presenting conference participants with previously written IEP documents, and fostering parent participation to the degree necessary to get the parent signature) are contrary to communicating with parents and encouraging the contributions of others. More specifically, there appears to be a discrepancy between teachers' theory of and actual practice in facilitating parent participation at the IEPC.

The special education teachers' perception of parent participation in the decision making process and writing of the IEP, as well as the communicative interaction during the conference revealed the following. Professionals agree that parents generally take an inactive role in the decision making process during the IEPC, and that getting parents involved in the development of the IEP is generally difficult. Teachers feel that parents usually do not contribute to writing IEP goals/objectives. They perceive that parents do not understand their role at the conference, and furthermore, prefer not to participate at the IEPC. In general, teachers perceive that parents are

not actively participating at the IEPC. The implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Contrary to the purpose of the IEP provision, special education teachers' perceptions of parents communicative interaction at the IEPC indicate that parents are passive recipients to information during the conference. More specifically, teachers agree that parents initiate few comments and ask relatively few questions during the IEPC. Additionally, teachers agree that by merely attending the IEPC, parents feel they fufill their responsibility during the meeting.

TEACHER TRAINING

The second research question addresses teachers' perceptions of training relevant to their role in facilitating the IEP conference.

RESEARCH QUESTION #2

What training have special education teachers received in specific skill areas relevant to their role in facilitating the IEPC?

The data relevant to research question two were categorized into three specific skill areas; each of which are germane to facilitating the IEPC. The first section addresses specific skills pertaining to working with parents. The second section outlines specific elements of communication as it relates to parent participation during

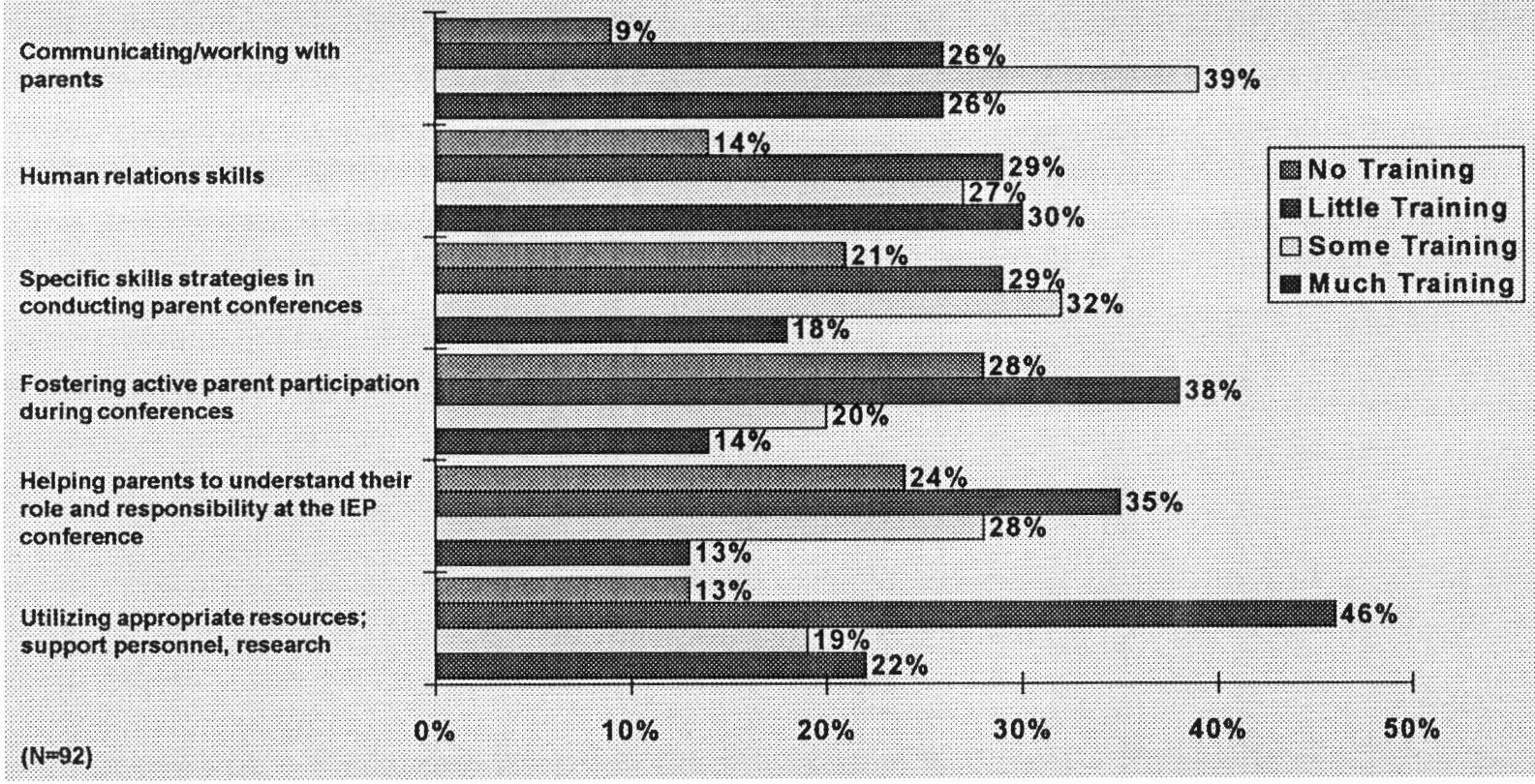
the IEPC. The third section delineates skills relevant to the special education teacher's position as conference facilitator.

Teacher Training in Working with Parents

The following data represent special education teachers' perceptions of the degree to which teachers have received training in specific skill areas related to working with parents. These findings are represented in TABLE 4. Of the 92 special education teachers surveyed, 65% percent claimed to have some/much training in communicating or working with parents. A little over half (57%) reported having some or much training in human relations skills. The teachers were equally divided between little/no training (50%) and some/much training (50%) in skills/strategies in conducting parent conferences. The majority of teachers (66%) revealed having little/no training in fostering active parent participation during conferences. And finally, more than half of the special education teachers (59%) reported having little/no training in helping parents to understand their role and responsibility at the IEP conference, and utilizing appropriate resources, support personnel, and research.

TABLE 4

Special Education Teachers' Perception of What Training Teachers Have Received in Specific Skill Areas Related to Working With Parents



(N=92)

Communication Skills Training

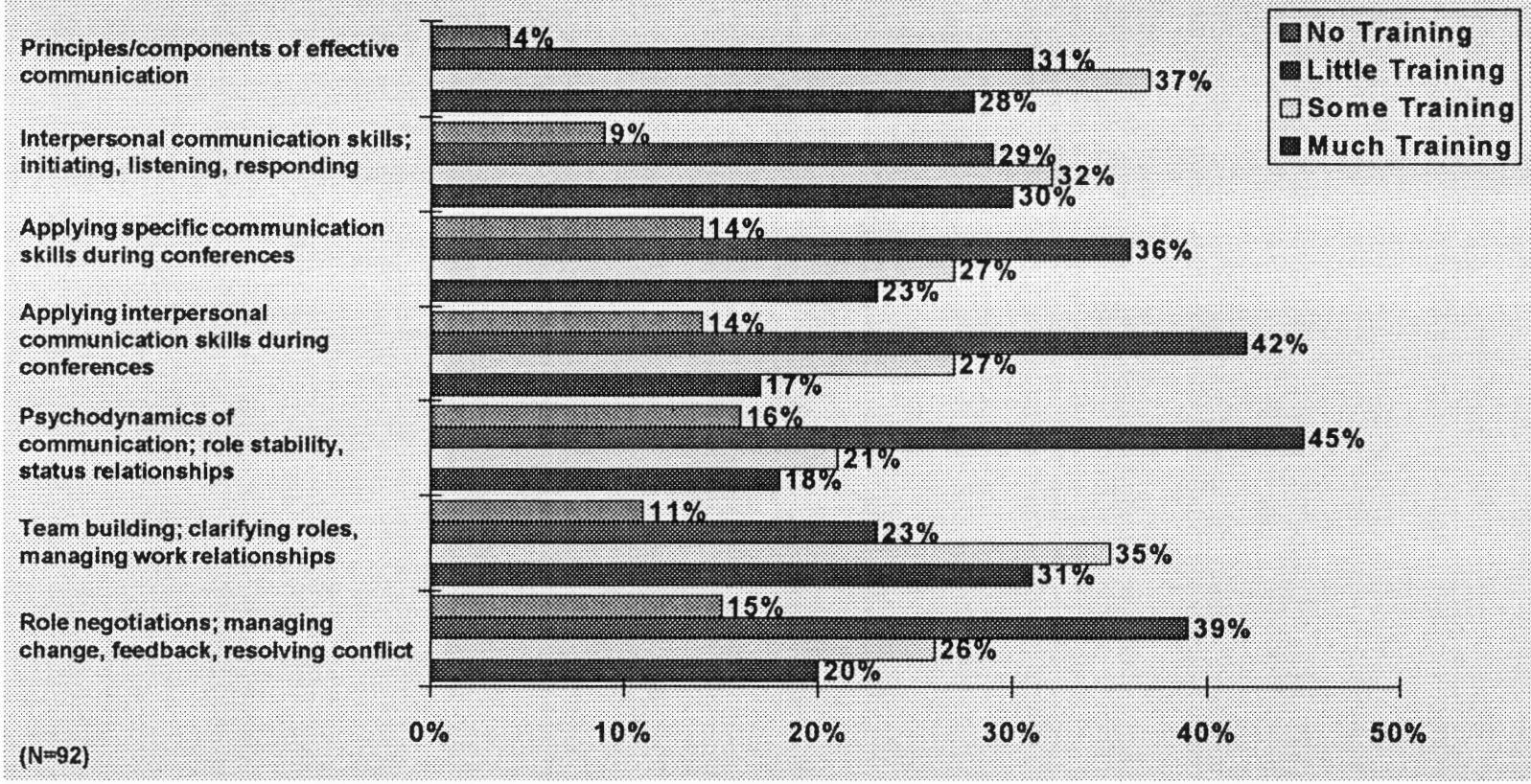
The following data represent special education teachers' perception of the degree to which teachers have received training in specific communication skills. These findings are represented in TABLE 5. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents claimed to have some/much training in principles/components of effective communication (65%), interpersonal communication skills (62%), and team building (66%). The teachers were equally divided between having little/no training (50%) and some/much training (50%) in applying specific communication skills during conferences. A little more than half of the respondents reported having little/no training in applying interpersonal communication skills during conferences (56%), role negotiations (54%), and psychdynamics of communication (66%).

Training in IEPC Facilitation

The following data represent special education teachers perceptions of the degree to which they have received training in specific skills relevant to their role in facilitating the IEPC. These findings are represented in TABLE 6. The findings reveal varying degrees of past training in each skill area. A little more than half of the respondents reported having some/much training in

TABLE 5

Special Education Teachers' Perception of What Training Teachers Have Received in Specific Communication Skills



(N=92)

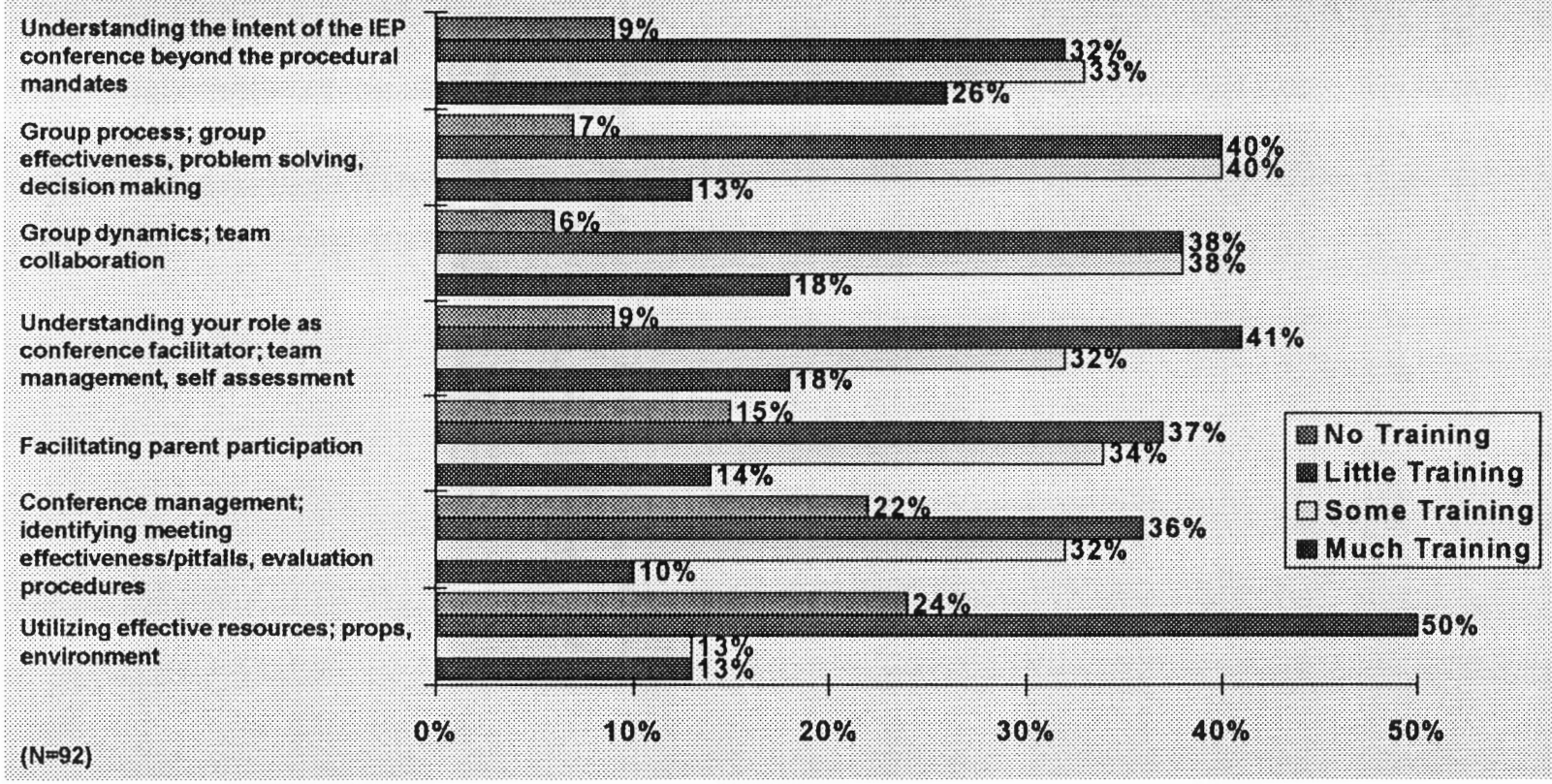
understanding the intent of the IEP conference (59%) (beyond the procedural mandates), group process (53%), and group dynamics (56%). The respondents were equally split between little/no training (50%) and some/much training (50%) in understanding their role as conference facilitator. Slightly more than half of the teachers reported having little/no training in facilitating parent participation (52%), and conference management (58%). Nearly three quarters of the special education teachers (74%) reported having little/no training in utilizing effective resources. In general, teachers are roughly divided between training and no training in all skill areas with the exception of training in utilizing effective resources, props, environment. A higher percentage of teachers reported having some past training in each skill area to that of much training. No more than a quarter of the respondents (26%) reported to have had much training in any skill area presented, indicating a lack of training to that of a sufficient degree of training in facilitating the IEPC.

SUMMARY

Teacher responses indicate varying degrees of past training within the specific skill areas regarding their role in working with parents, communication, and facilitating the IEPC. The profile of training could be

TABLE 6

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of What Training Teachers Have Received in Specific Skill Areas Related to Facilitating the IEP Conference



(N=92)

charactorized as spotty. While teachers report some/much training in specific skills areas (e.g. human relation skills, effective communication, and team building), there is a lack of training in specific skill areas (e.g. fostering parent participation, helping parents understanding their role at the IEPC, and applying interpersonal skills) that are equally critical to effectively fostering parent participation at the IEPC. Generally, the data reveal gaps in training to that of an adequate degree of training in specific skills relevant to working with parents, communicating, and facilitating the IEPC.

TEACHER TRAINING NEEDS

The third research question addresses the extent to which teacher training is needed for special education teachers to enhance parent participation during the IEPC.

RESEARCH QUESTION #3

What are special education teachers' perceptions of teacher training needs in specific skill areas relevant to facilitating the IEP conference?

The data relevant to research question three were categorized into three skill areas; each of which are germane to facilitating the IEPC. The first section addresses specific skills pertaining to working with

parents. The second section outlines specific elements of communication relevant to facilitating the IEP conference. The third section delineates specific skills pertinent to the special education teachers' role as conference facilitator.

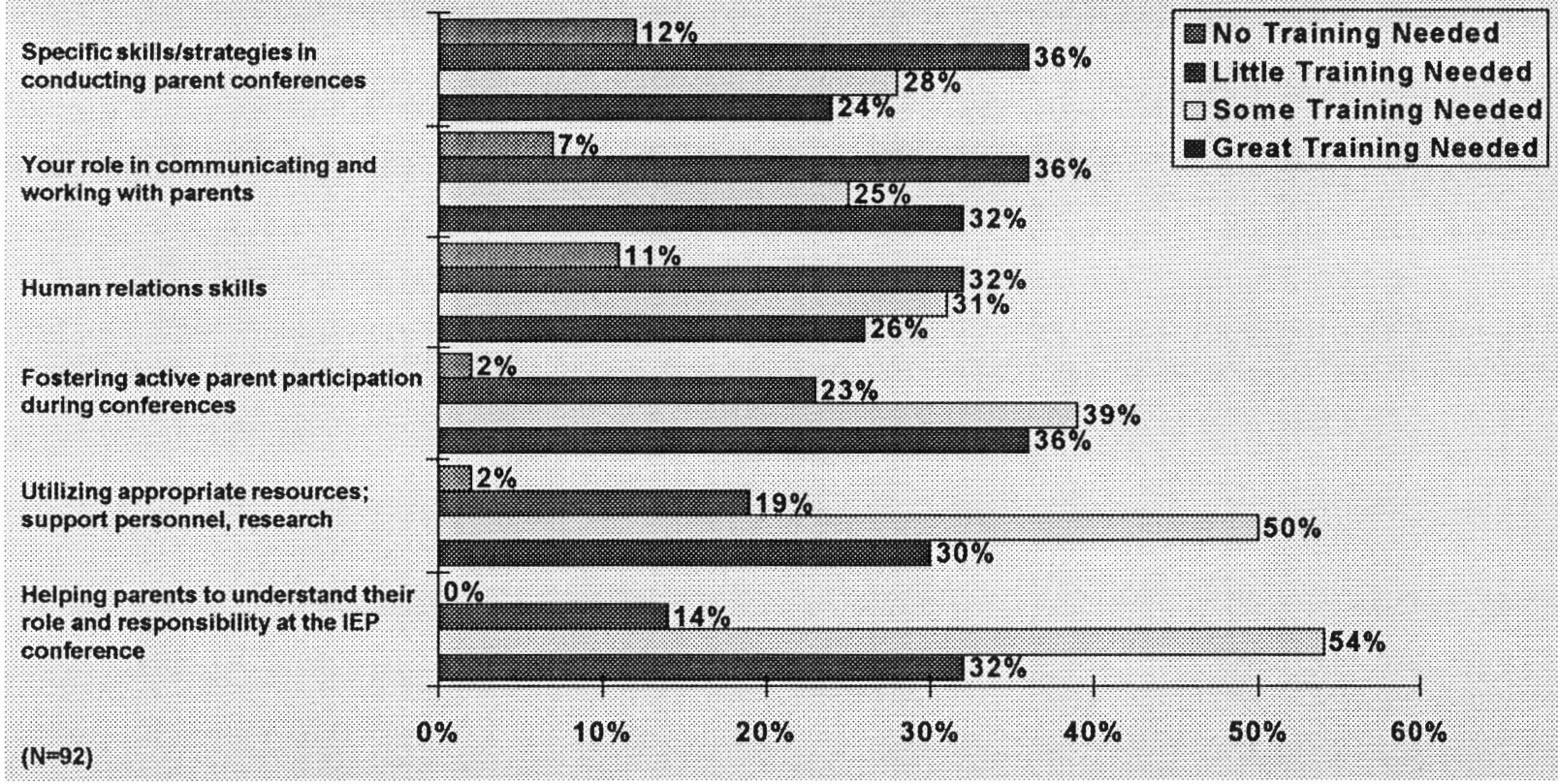
Training Needs for Working with Parents

The findings that represent special education teachers' perceptions of the degree to which teacher training is needed in specific skills related to working with parents are represented in TABLE 7.

The results reveal skewed responses regarding teacher training needs in working with parents. More specifically, the special education teachers surveyed indicated a need for training in all specific skill areas relevant to working with parents. Approximately half of the teachers perceived some/great need for training in skills/strategies in conducting parent conferences (52%), communicating/working with parents (57%), and human relations skills (57%). A least a quarter of the teachers perceived a great need for teacher training in these same skill areas. Three quarters of the special education teachers (75%) indicated some/great need for training in fostering active parent participation during conferences. Eighty percent (80%) perceive some/great need for training

TABLE 7

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of the Degree to Which Teacher Training is Needed in Specific Skill Areas Related to Working With Parents



(N=92)

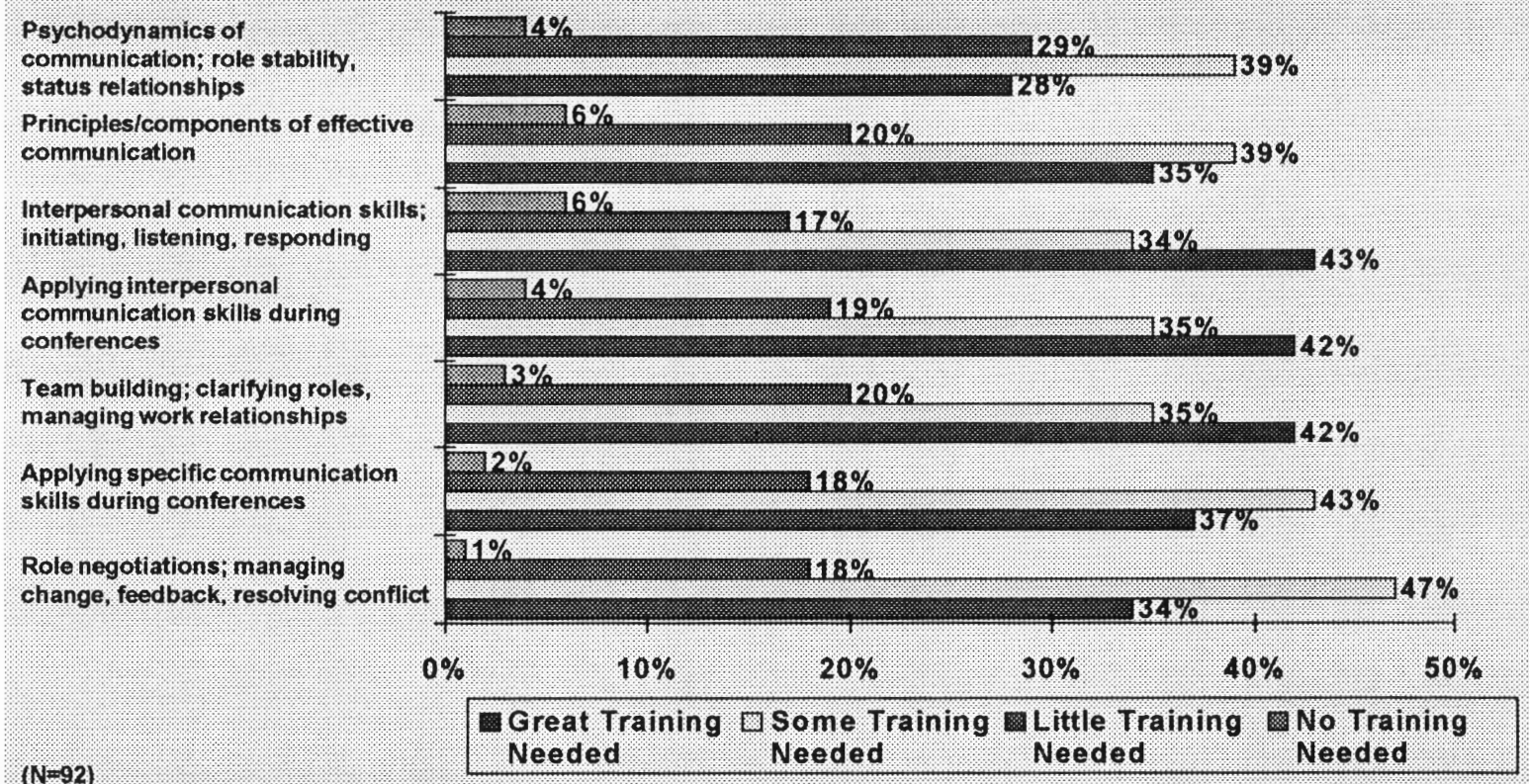
in utilizing appropriate resources (e.g., support personnel,and research). An overwhelming percentage of teachers (86%) indicated some/great need for teacher training in helping parents to understand their role/responsibility at the IEP conference. Of those teachers, 32% perceived a great need for training, and zero (0%) teachers felt that no training is needed.

Training Needs in Communication

The results relevant to special education teachers' perceptions of the degree to which teacher training is needed in specific skills in communication as it relates to the teachers' role in facilitating the IEPC are represented in TABLE 8. These results indicate that teachers perceive a need for teacher training in all six specific skill areas of communication presented. Of the special education teachers surveyed, 67% perceived some/great need for teacher training in the psychodynamics of communication. Approximately three quarters of the teachers indicated some/great need for teacher training in principles/components of effective communication (74%), and interpersonal communication (77%), applying interpersonal communication skills during conferences (77%), and team building (77%). Nearly 80% indicated some/great need for teacher training in applying specific

TABLE 8

Special Education Teachers' Perception of the Degree to Which Teacher Training is Needed For Specific Skills in Communication During the IEP Conference



(N=92)

communication skills during conferences, and role negotiation (81%). Over one third of the teachers indicated a great need for training in six of the seven skill areas relevant to communicating during the IEPC.

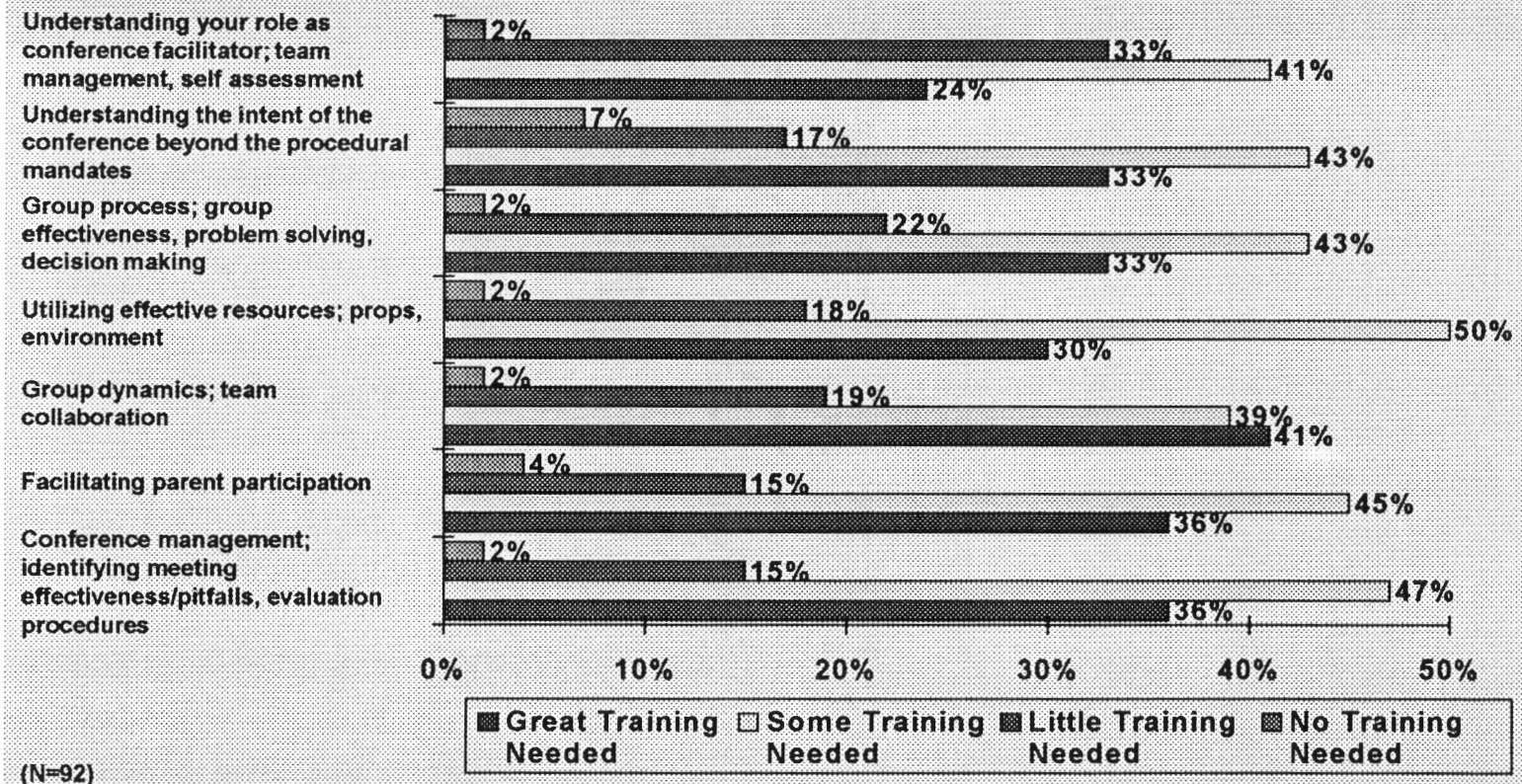
Training Needs for Facilitating the IEPC

Special education teachers' perceptions of the degree to which teacher training is needed in specific skills in facilitating the IEP conference are represented in TABLE 9.

Based on the survey responses, 65% of the special education teachers expressed some/great need for teacher training in understanding their role as conference facilitator. Approximately three quarters of the teachers (76%) perceived some/great need for teacher training in two skill areas; understanding the intent of the IEP conference (beyond the procedural mandates), and, group process (i.e., group effectiveness, problem solving, and decision making). Most teachers (80%) indicated some/great need for teacher training in utilizing effective resources (e.g., props, environment), and, group dynamics (i.e., team collaboration). And finally, 81% and 83% respectively felt that there is some/great need for teacher training in facilitating parent participation, and conference management (i.e., meeting effectiveness, pitfalls, and, evaluation procedures). In general, at least one third of

TABLE 9

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of the Degree to Which Teacher Training is Needed in Specific Skills in Facilitating the IEP Conference



(N=92)

the teachers perceived some need, and no less than a quarter of the teachers perceived a great need for training in specific skills relevant to their role as conference facilitator.

SUMMARY

After reviewing the data relevant to research question three, the following summary of teachers' perceptions of teacher training in specific skills germane to enhancing parent participation during the IEPC can be made. Teachers consistently perceive a need for teacher training in all specific skills presented. In spite of the varying degrees teachers have had training in the skill areas presented, special education teachers acknowledge the need for teacher training in those skills. No less than a quarter of the teachers indicated a great need for training in all 20 specific skill areas germane to enhancing parent participation at the IEPC. In general, special education teachers recognize a need for training in all skills pertaining to working with parents, communication, and skills relevant to the special education teachers' role as conference facilitator.

CHANGES NEEDED FOR GREATER PARENT PARTICIAPTION AT THE IEPC

The fourth and final research question address teachers' perceptions regarding modifications or changes in

the IEP conference procedure in order to enhance parent participation.

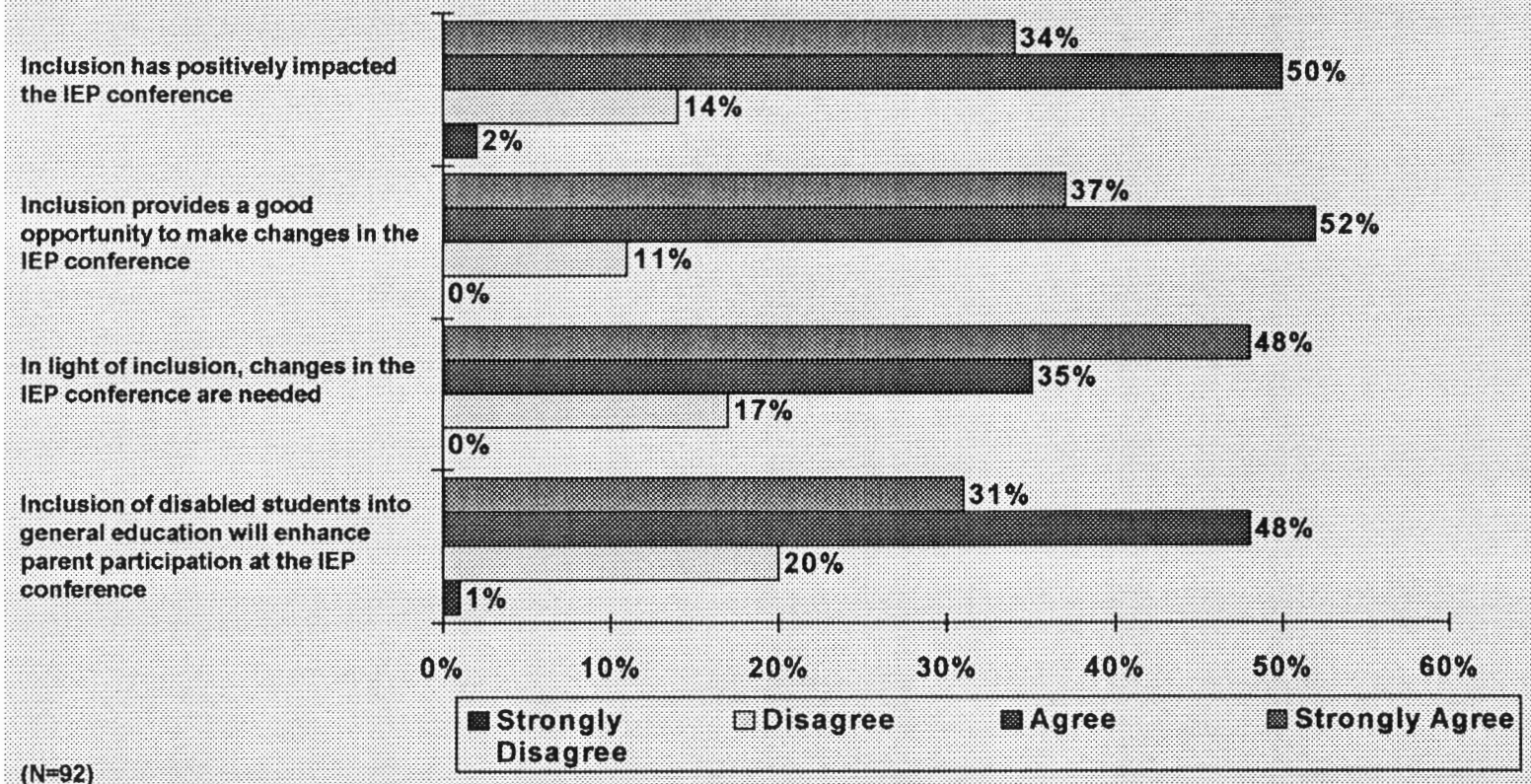
RESEARCH QUESTION #4

What are special education teachers' perceptions of modifications/changes in the IEP conference to enhance parent participation within inclusive education?

Special education teachers' perceptions of modifications/changes in the IEP conference in light of inclusive education are represented in TABLE 10. Of the 92 teachers surveyed, 84% agreed or strongly agreed that inclusion has positively impacted the IEP conference. Most professionals (89%) agreed or strongly agreed that inclusion provides a good opportunity to make changes in the IEP conference procedure, and agreed or strongly agreed (83%) that in light of inclusion, changes in the IEP conference are needed. Ninety-seven percent of the education teachers agreed or strongly agreed that inclusion of disabled students into general education will enhance communication among educational professionals at the IEP conference. Over three quarters of the professionals (79%) agreed or strongly agreed that inclusion of disabled students into general education will enhance parent participation at the IEPC.

TABLE 10

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Modifications/Changes in the IEP Conference in Light of Inclusive Education



(N=92)

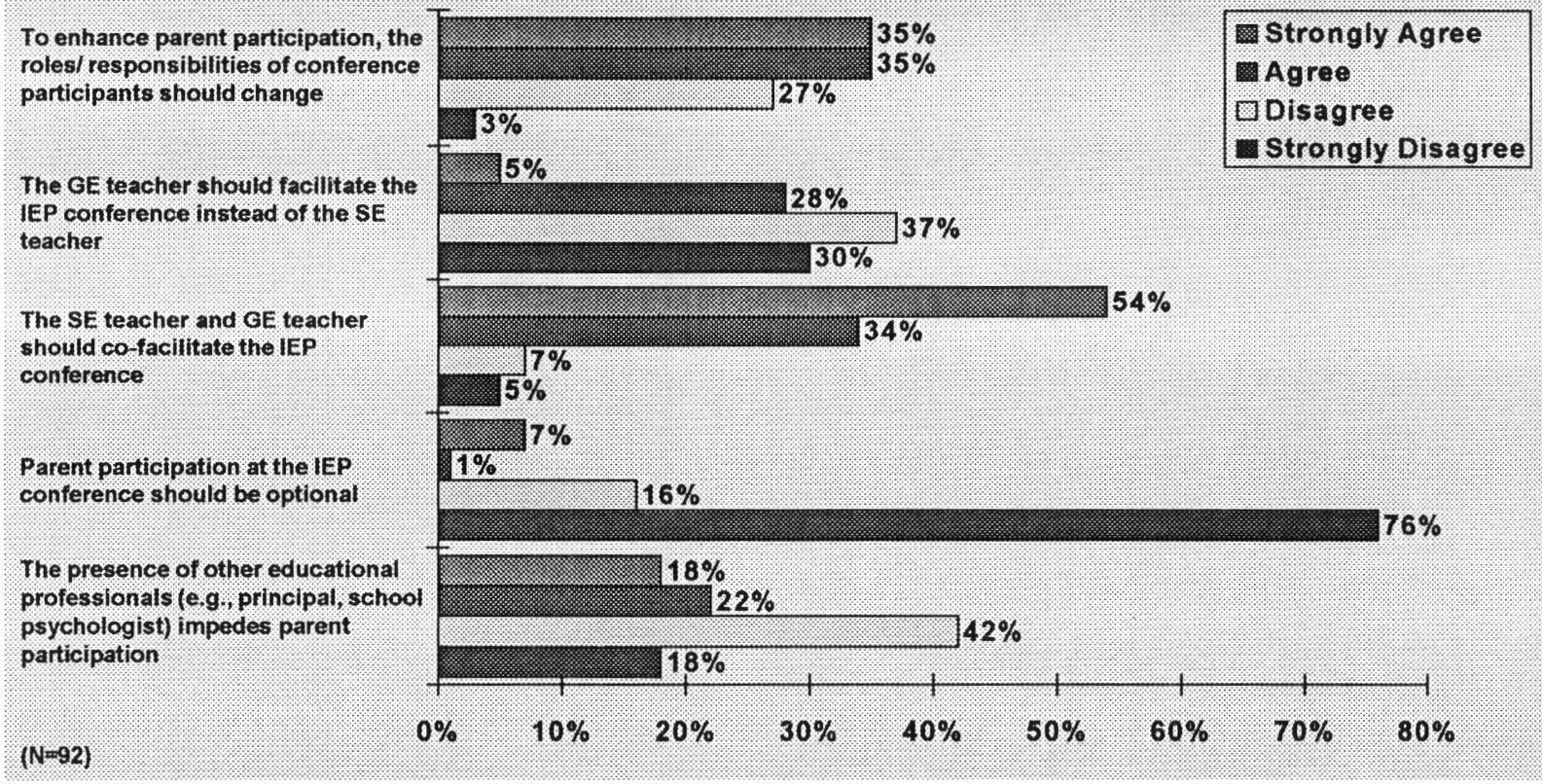
Changes in IEPC specific to Conference Participants

Special education teachers' perceptions of modification/changes in the IEP conference specific to conference participants are represented in TABLE 11. Many professionals (70%) agreed or strongly agreed that in order to enhance parent participation, the roles/responsibilities of conference participants must change. Two thirds of the teachers (67%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the general education teacher should facilitate the IEP conference instead of the special education teacher. Most teachers (88%) agreed or strongly agreed that the special education and general education teachers should co-facilitate the IEP conference. Nearly all of teachers (92%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that parent participation at the IEP conference should be optional. More than half of the repondents (60%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the presence of other educational professionals (i.e., principal, school psychologist) impedes parent participiption. Finally, 83% of the teachers surveyed disagreed or strongly disagreed that only the parent, special education teacher, and general education teacher should participate at the IEPC.

Two thirds of the teachers (66%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the IEP should be written prior to

TABLE 11

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Modifications/Changes in the IEP Conference Specific to Conference Participants

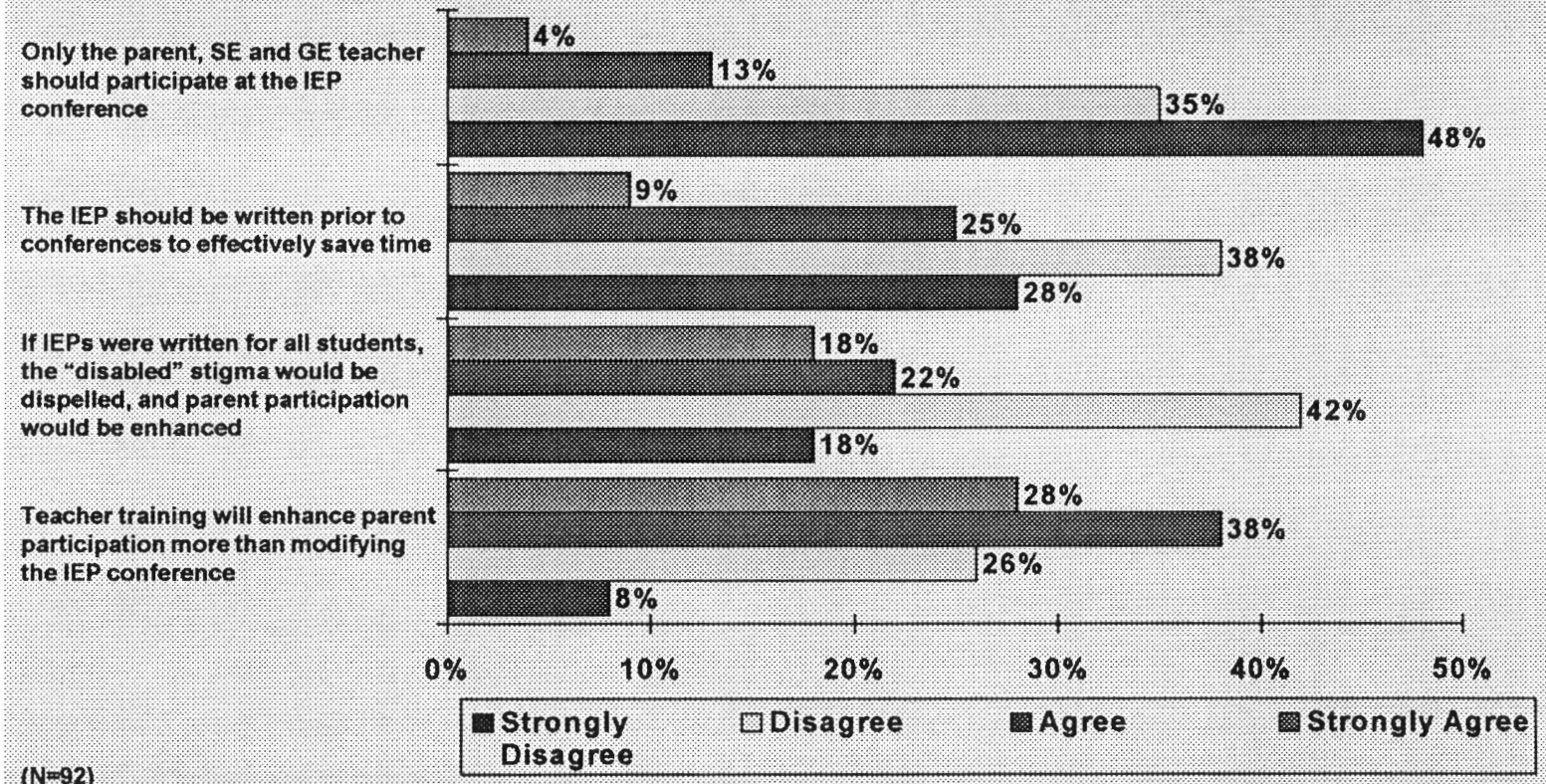


(N=92)

TABLE 11 (continued)

NOTE: Maximum value changes from 80% (page 72) to 50%

Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Modifications/Changes in the IEP Conference Specific to Conference Participants



(N=92)

conferences to save time. This is an interesting contrast to the fact (Table 1) that 82% believed that some special education teachers present conference participants with previously written IEP goals/objectives. Sixty percent (60%) of the teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that if IEPs were written for all students (special and general education), the "disabled" stigma would be dispelled and parent participation would be enhanced. And finally, consistent with the findings relevant to research question three, special education teachers (66%) agreed or strongly agreed that teacher training will enhance parent participation more than modifying the IEP conference

SUMMARY

The following summary of special education teachers' perceptions of changes in the IEP conference to enhance parent participation can be made. Based on the data, special education teachers agreed that inclusion has positively impacted the IEP conference. More specifically, teachers felt that inclusion of disabled students into general education would enhance communication among professionals, as well as, parent participation at the IEP conference. While teachers agreed that inclusion has been a positive force at the IEP conference, they felt that changes in the IEP conference were needed, and that

inclusion provided a good opportunity for such change. For example, teachers agreed that the special education and general education teachers should co-facilitate the IEP conference. While teachers agreed that inclusion has positively impacted the IEP conference, and parent participation in general, they felt that teacher training would enhance parent participation more than modifying the IEP conference procedure.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Previous chapters of this document have addressed the background of the problem, extant literature, methodological procedures used in conducting the study, and presentation of findings based on data analysis. Following a brief summary, a discussion of the findings related to each research question, conclusions, implications and suggestions for further research will be presented in this chapter.

SUMMARY

While inclusive education could set the stage for achieving the intent of Public Law 101-476, educational researchers agree that policy questions and operational issues of this initiative lack clarity and definition. The literature calls for more studies to delineate the underlying facets of inclusive education. For example, more information regarding current individualized education planning conference (IEPC) procedures as well as the future direction of the IEPC in light of inclusive education must be obtained. The educational community concurs that the data gathered must be from those individuals who facilitate

the IEPC. The perceptions of IEPC service providers can be utilized as a foundation for developing strategies to ameliorate documented problems of poor parent participation during the IEPC, as well as to effectively guide the future course of the IEP process in light of inclusive education.

The purpose of this study was to assess the perceptions of special education teachers regarding parent participation during the IEPC within inclusive education. More specifically, teachers' perceptions of parent participation during the IEPC, previous training, as well as specific training needs as it relates to the special education teachers' role in facilitating the IEPC were explored. Additionally, recommendations to rectify poor parent participation during the IEPC were assessed.

Procedures and Instrumentation

To achieve the purpose of this study, the researcher designed a Likert-type questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to elicit data relevant to the research questions pertaining to this study. The population involved in this study was comprised of special education teachers from an Intermediate School District located in Southern Michigan, who are participating in inclusive education.

Subsequent to administrative and school board

approval, the researcher arranged with the director of special education to distribute the questionnaire during a special education inservice/meeting. The researcher collected the completed questionnaires at the close of the inservice/meeting in person to enhance the return rate.

Analysis

This exploratory study was descriptive in nature. Data obtained from the questionnaires were presented via frequencies and percentages. It is anticipated that the information from this study will provide relevant data regarding the IEP component of inclusive education. This information will also serve to generate needed input from those individuals who implement the IEPC within inclusive education. Data from this study may have implications for future teacher training. The findings may also provide relevant information toward efforts to increase meaningful parent participation during the IEPC, and ultimately, achieve the intent of the IEP provision of P.L.101-476 within inclusive education.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The four research questions are restated with a discussion of the findings.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How do special education teachers perceive parent participation during the IEPC within inclusive education?

After reviewing the data relevant to research question one, the following summary of special education teachers' perceptions of parent participation during the IEPC within inclusive education can be made. The data relevant to the special education teachers' role in facilitating the IEPC, as it relates to parent participation during the IEPC, indicate that the majority of special education teachers agree that communicating with parents is one of the primary goals of the IEPC. Most professionals agree that the way they direct the conference does have an effect on parent participation at the IEPC. Additionally, teachers feel that they do encourage the contributions of others during the conference.

The survey responses indicate a discrepancy in the special education teachers' perception of their role in facilitating parent participation during the IEPC. While teachers agree that communicating with parents is one of the primary goals of the conference, they concur that some special education teachers present conference participants with previously written IEP goals/objectives. The teachers surveyed agree that they encourage the contributions of others during the IEPC, yet special education teachers agree that parent participation at the

IEPC is fostered to the degree necessary to obtain the parent signature.

Special education teachers perceive parents as generally taking an inactive role in the decision making process during the IEPC. Teachers agree that parent usually do not contribute to writing IEP goals/objectives, and that getting parents involved in the development of the IEP is generally difficult. Special education teachers perceive that parents speak less than the special education teacher during the IEPC. More specifically, teachers agree that parents initiate few comments and ask relatively few questions during the conference. The perceptions of special education teachers within inclusive education support the findings of previous studies (Goldstein,et al.,1980; Scanlon, Arick and Phelps, 1981; Leyser and Cole, 1984; Scanlon, et al.,1985; Vaugn, Bos, Harrell and Lasky, 1988) indicating poor parent participation in the decision making process and writing of the IEP during the IEPC within the traditional special education delivery system.

Parent Communicative Interaction

Data relevant to special education teachers' perceptions of parent communicative interaction during the

IEPC indicate that, in most cases, one or both parents attend the IEPC. Teachers agree that parents do have clarity regarding their child's disability, however, teachers feel that parents do not have clarity regarding their role/responsibility in the IEPC. Additionally, special education teachers perceive that parents feel that merely attending the conference fulfills their responsibilities during the meeting. Special education teachers agree that parents prefer to not participate in the development of the IEP. Teachers also concur that parents are passive recipients of information during the IEPC.

These findings support previous studies that assessed parent participation at the IEPC from various perspectives. More specifically, the data derived from this study is strikingly similar to research that assessed parent participation from unbiased observations of IEPCs (Goldstein et al.,1980; Vacc et al.,1985; Turnbull and Hughes, 1987; Harrell and Lasky, 1988), as well as from special education teachers' perspectives (White and Calhoun, 1987).

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What training have special education teachers received in specific skill areas relevant to their role in facilitating the IEPC?

The data pertaining to research question two were categorized into three specific skill areas; each of which are relevant to the special education teachers' role in facilitating the IEPC. The following summary of special education teachers' perceptions of the degree to which they have received training in specific skill areas pertaining to facilitating the IEPC can be made. Generally, teacher responses indicate varying degrees of teacher training within the specific skill areas regarding their role in working with parents, communication, and facilitating the IEPC. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents have had some/much training in communicating/working with parents. Approximately one-quarter have received much training in this skill area, and one-third reported little/no training. Special education teachers were equally divided between receiving little/no training and some/much training in skills/strategies in conducting parent conference. Approximately one-quarter of the teachers have received no training in this skill area. Special education teachers have received little/no training in fostering parent participation during conferences, utilizing

resources, support personnel, and helping parents to understand their role/responsibility at the IEPC. These findings may correlate with teachers' perceptions that parents do not understand their role at the IEPC. The implications of teacher training in this skill area as it may relate to parent participation at the IEPC will be discussed later in this chapter.

Based on the data, special education teachers have received some/much training in interpersonal communication skills and principles/components of effective communication. Approximately one-third of the respondents have received little/no training in these two skill areas. Two-thirds of the teachers also perceive that they have had training in team building (e.g.,clarifying roles, managing work relationships). Teachers are equally divided between no/little and some/much training in applying communication skills during the IEPC. More specifically, while nearly one-quarter claimed to have received much training in this skill area, almost half of the teachers reported little/no training. Specific communication skills that special education teachers claim to have received little/no training in were applying interpersonal communication skills during conferences, role negotiation (e.g., managing change, feedback, and resolving conflict), and psychodynamics of communication (e.g., role stability,

status relationships).

Data analysis indicates that teachers have had varying degrees of training in skills relevant to facilitating the IEPC. A little more than half of the teachers surveyed reported some/much training in understanding the intent of the IEPC (beyond the procedural mandates), group process (e.g., group effectiveness, problem solving, and decision making), and group dynamics (e.g., team collaboration). Less than one-quarter claimed to have received much training in these last two skill areas. Specific skill areas where special education teachers have received little/no training were effective resources, and conference management. Nearly one-quarter of the respondents reported no training in these two skill areas.

The results reveal a lack of training to that of adequate teacher training when looking at the data as a whole. The deficiency of teacher training in specific skill areas found in this study support numerous studies (Turnbull et al.,1978; Goldstein et al.,1980; Nadler and Shore, 1980; McNamara, 1986; Hughes et al., 1987) conducted in the late 1970s and 1980s that examined the special education teacher's role as conference facilitator within the traditional special education delivery system. The findings from this study also support previous research (Price, 1980; Bensky, Shaw, Gouse, Bates, Dixon, and Beene,

1980; Kroth and Simpson, 1977) indicating a lack of preservice teacher training in working and commmunicating with parents.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

What are special education teachers' perceptions of teacher training needs in specific skill areas relevant to facilitating the IEPC?

After reviewing the findings relevant to research question three, the following summary of teachers' perceptions of teacher training germane to enhancing parent participation during the IEPC can be made. Teachers consistently perceive a need for teacher training in all 20 skill areas presented. In spite of the fact that special education teachers acknowledge having training in some of the specific skill areas pertaining to their role in enhancing parent participation during the IEPC, they express a uniform need for teacher training in each specific skill presented. In general, special education teachers perceive a need for teacher training in each skill relevant to working with parents, communication, and skills pertaining to the special education teachers' role as conference facilitator.

The data from this study support the findings from previous research revealing insufficient training and preparation for IEPC participants (Kroth and Simpson, 1977;

Price, 1980; Hughes et al., 1987). Furthermore, the findings of this study substantiate the call for teacher training geared specifically to the educator's role in facilitating parent participation at the IEPC (Frank and Ehly, 1983; Fleming and Fleming, 1983; Moore et al., 1989; Smith, 1990).

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

What are special education teachers' perceptions of modifications/changes in the IEPC to enhance parent participation within inclusive education?

Survey responses of special education teachers' perceptions of changes in the IEPC to enhance parent participation indicate that, overall, most teachers agree that inclusive education has positively impacted the IEPC. More specifically, teachers agree that inclusion of students with disabilities into general education will enhance communication among professionals, as well as parent participation at the IEPC. While teachers feel that inclusive education has been a positive force at the IEPC, a vast majority contend that changes in the IEPC procedures are needed, and that inclusive education provides a good opportunity for such change. For example, teachers agree that the special education and general education teacher should co-facilitate the IEPC. The teachers surveyed agree that teacher training will enhance

parent participation at the IEPC more than modifying the IEPC process.

The findings of this study substantiate concern within the educational community (Trent, 1989; Jenkins, 1990) that the inclusive education reform movement has gained momentum in spite of unanswered policy questions and operational issues of this initiate. Additionally, the findings relevant to research question four support the call for more studies and analysis (Davis and Maheady, 1991; Semmel et al., 1991; Lieberman, 1992) for successful implementation of this reform movement.

CONCLUSIONS

Parent Participation at the IEPC

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions can be made regarding special education teachers' perceptions of parent participation at the IEPC within inclusive education. Parents are not active and equal participants at the IEPC. Although parents are legally entitled to be involved in the development of their child's IEP, parents are passive participants in the decision making process and writing of the IEP. The researcher concludes, based on these findings, that seventeen years after the inception of the law,the issue of poor parent participation at the IEPC has yet to be

ameliorated, and continues to prevail within inclusive education.

Teacher Training

The following conclusions can be made regarding special education teachers' perceptions of the degree to which training was received in skill areas related to their role in the IEPC. While teachers report to have received training in specific skill areas relevant to working with parents, communication, and facilitating the IEPC, they, at the same time, report little or no training in other specific skill areas presented. Even though, for example, two-thirds of the teachers have received training in communicating/working with parents (Table 4), the remaining are attempting to carry out their role as conference facilitator with little/no training in this skill area. In general, these data indicate a discrepancy in areas of teacher training received. While teachers have received some training, there are missing components or "gaps" in specific areas of teacher training, which are equally critical to effectively working with parents, communication, and facilitating the IEPC. In answering research question two, special education teachers lack training in specific skill areas related to their role and responsibility as IEP conference facilitator within

inclusive education. These findings may have implications for the degree of parent participation at the IEPC, which are later discussed.

The following conclusions can be made regarding special education teachers' perceptions of the degree to which teacher training is needed to enhance parent participation at the IEPC. Teachers perceive a need for teacher training in all skill areas germane to working with parents, communication, and facilitating the IEPC. Even though teachers have had training in certain skill areas presented, they uniformally recognize a need for training in those same skill areas. In general, based on the survey responses, teacher training is needed to enhance parent participation at the IEPC. More specifically, teacher training is needed to enhance the special education teachers' ability to foster parent participation at the IEPC.

Changes in the IEPC

The following conclusions can be made regarding special education teachers' perceptions of modifications/changes in the IEPC conducted within inclusive education. In general, inclusive education is viewed positively in light of the IEPC process. Additionally, the inclusive education reform movement is seen as a good opportunity to make needed

changes in the IEPC procedure. While teachers perceive that inclusive education could be the juncture to improving the IEPC process, teacher training is perceived as a more effective means to improve parent participation. These data support the findings relevant to research questions two and three, as it relates to teacher training and its potential impact on parent participation at the IEPC.

IMPLICATIONS

Parent Participation at the IEPC within Inclusive Education

Several implications can be offered regarding special education teachers' perceptions of parent participation at the IEPC within inclusive education. The data relevant to research question one present an obvious discrepancy in teachers' perceptions of their role in fostering parent participation during the IEPC. While teachers advocate the concept of communicating with parents, their actions as conference facilitator fall short of that intent. The inconsistency in teacher responses implies that special education teachers have yet to embrace the intent of the IEP provision. Teachers have not established parent/teacher collaboration in the decision making and writing of the IEP. The results may also imply that teachers lack the knowledge and understanding to fully and effectively carry out their role and responsibility as conference

facilitator, and more specificaly, parent participation at the IEPC.

The findings of this study reveal that not only are special education teachers not fostering parent participation at the IEPC, special education administrators may not be enforcing it. The data imply that administrators have yet to execute adequate, if any, preventantive measures to ameliorate this well documented issue, within their local education agency.

The problem of poor parent participation at the IEPC still prevails in spite of significant reform efforts within special education. These findings imply that, to date, inclusive education has not significantly impacted the level of parent participation at the IEPC. Parent participation at the IEPC remains low, inspite of special education reform efforts via inclusive education. The findings from this study substantiate the criticism that inclusive education has progressed in spite of unanswered policy questions and operational issues, as well as the call for continued research (Lieberman, 1992; Davis and Maheady, 1991; Semmel et al., 1991) to acquire the essential data to build a solid foundation for truly effective change via inclusive education.

Teacher Training

The following implications can be made regarding special education teachers' perceptions of the degree to which they have received training in skills related to working with parents, communication, and facilitating parent participation at the IEPC. Although special education teachers have received training in some skill areas relevant to their role as conference facilitator, training in other skill areas; equally critical to effectively fostering parent participation and facilitating the IEPC; may not have been offered or available. The findings imply that teacher training may have been "spotty" or disconnected. There may be a direct correlation between the degree and/or quality of training received in specific skill areas related to working with parents, communication, and facilitating the IEPC, and the degree and/or quality of parent participation at conferences.

There may be implications for school administration staff development policies and procedures. Special education supervisors/administrators may not have developed and implemented a comprehensive system of personnel development, as mandated in Section 613 (3) of P.L.94-142, (P.L.94-142, The Education For All Handicapped Act, Nov.29, 1975, U.S. Code, Section 613(3)), to assure that teachers are adequately prepared and trained to carry out job

responsibilities. Additionally, LEA administrators may not have conducted adequate assessment of teacher training needs, and/or solicited teacher input, strongly advocated in the staff development literature (Joyce and Showers, 1980, 1983, 1990; Corbitt, 1989; Nelson, 1989; Villa, 1989), to effectively design, implement, and evaluate teacher training.

In spite of the degree to which teachers have received training in the 20 skill areas presented, they overwhelmingly recognize that special educators' skills in working with parents, communication, and facilitating the IEPC, need improvement. The fact that teachers indicated a need for more training implies that teachers may indirectly recognize that they play a role in poor parent participation at the IEPC, and may feel that training would enhance their skills as conference facilitator. The data supports previous research (McLaughlin, et al.,1988; Smith, 1990) indicating a mismatch between teacher preparation and the realities of the job market, relevant to the special educators' role as conference facilitator.

Implications for special education administrators, as well as, higher education agencies may also exist. The fact that special education teachers indicate a strong need for teacher training may imply that the preservice and/or

inservice training they report to have received in these skill areas was inadequate,or, for a variety of reasons (previously discussed) not well executed. Teachers may have received adequate training in other aspects of their job responsibilities, however, special education administrators and/or higher education agencies may not have prioritized teacher training in skill areas relevant to facilitating the parent participation at the IEPC.

Changes in the IEPC

The following implications can be made regarding special education teachers'perceptions of modifications/changes in the IEPC to enhance parent participation. The findings imply that special education teachers are receptive to inclusive education in light of the IEP process. While teachers feel that inclusive education has been a positive force at the IEPC, the data implies however that, to date, inclusive education has not impacted or improved parent participation at the IEPC. While teachers contend that changes are needed, they basically endorse the IEP process, and do not see the IEP procedure as the causal factor in poor parent participation. This is substantiated by the fact that teachers perceive that teacher training will enhance parent participation more than modifying the IEPC. In general, the data point to training as the key factor to enhancing

parent participation at the IEPC.

The data also imply that school administrators may not be current with staff needs as they relate to facilitating IEPCs, and, in particular, fostering parent participation. More specifically, special education administrators may not have adequately prepared/empowered their staff to meet their job responsibilities as conference facilitator. There may also be implications for higher education agencies regarding special education teacher preservice preparation in working with parents, communication and facilitating the IEPC, which were discussed earlier.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations can be made regarding parent participation at the IEPC within inclusive education, teacher training, and changes/modifications within the IEPC process.

(1) Special education administrators need to address the well documented problem of poor parent participation at the IEPC, and implement effective preventative measures to ameliorate it within their local education agency.

(2) It is recommended that special education administrators conduct a thorough needs assessment, as prescribed by best practices for inservice training, in order to develop and implement effective teacher training.

(3) Special education administrators need to provide effective teacher training as prescribed by the best practices for inservice training. Training is needed for special education teachers to effectively carry out their role as conference facilitator, and ultimately, the spirit of the law. It is recommended that teachers receive training in specific skills relevant to working with parents, communication, and facilitating the IEPC.

(4) Higher education agencies need to address teacher training needs as they relate to special education teachers' preservice preparation in working with parents, communication, and facilitating the IEPC, so that there will be a match between teacher training and job expectations.

(5) It is recommended that local education agencies and higher education agencies join forces to ensure thorough teacher training to preclude future "gaps" in the training received.

Based on the implications of this study, recommendations can be made regarding future research relevant to this topic.

(1) More information is needed regarding the IEP component of inclusive education to address procedural questions and operational issues of this reform movement.

(2) This study was descriptive in nature. Special education

teachers perceive that changes in the IEPC process are needed, and that inclusive education is a good opportunity for such change. Future research is needed to obtain specific information regarding modifications/changes in the IEPC process. The IEPC process should be further examined to identify those procedural policies that may inhibit parent participation, as well as those procedures that maximize parent participation.

(3) The limitations of this study include a small population from a limited geograghical area. Future research is needed to assess special education teachers perceptions relevant to this topic from other geograghical locations/populations to determine if the data was generalizable to the special education community.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Virginia Tech
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Northern Virginia Graduate Center

College of Education
2990 Telestar Court, Falls Church, Virginia 22042-1287
(703) 698-6051 Fax: (703) 698-6062

DATE

Dear Professional Colleague:

Enclosed is a questionaire relevant to parent participation during the IEP conference (to include initial and review IEP conferences). As the facilitator of the IEP conference, it is anticipated that your responses will serve to provide important insight regarding this topic.

Research clearly indicates that teacher input in the development and implementation of the educational process results in effectively achieving program goals. This questionaire provides you with an opportunity to contribute your views regarding parent participation during the IEP conference, teacher training, and potential procedural modifications in the IEP process. The data collected may influence the future direction of the IEP process in light of inclusion education in Jackson County.

The data will be a significant component of my dissertation research for the Doctor of Education degree at Virginia Tech. Time to complete this questionaire is approximately twenty minutes.

Your time and effort are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jill M. Robinson

Ed.D. candidate
(313) 474-5465

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SECTION I

Instructions:

The following are statements regarding parent participation during the IEP conference. The term parent participation refers to the degree to which parents contribute, take part in, or share in the decision making process and writing of their child's IEP. Based on your experience, please circle the numeral that indicates your level of agreement with each of the 20 statements.

	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT			
	STRONGLY AGREE			STRONGLY DISAGREE
1. Parents are equal participants in educational planning during the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
2. Parents feel that merely attending the conference fulfills their responsibilities during the meeting.	1	2	3	4
3. The special education teacher receives little support in writing IEP goals/objectives.	1	2	3	4
4. Parents usually do contribute to writing IEP goals/objectives.	1	2	3	4
5. Communicating with parents is one of the primary goals of the conference.	1	2	3	4
6. Getting parents involved in the development of the IEP is generally difficult.	1	2	3	4
7. In general, parents are passive recipients (e.g.,head nodding) to information during the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
8. In most cases, one or both parent(s) attend their child's IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
9. Parents have a high degree of clarity regarding their role/responsibility in the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
10. The way special education teachers direct the interaction during the conference has no impact on parent participation.	1	2	3	4

Please continue

	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT			
	STRONGLY AGREE			STRONGLY DISAGREE
12. The special education teacher encourages the contributions of others during the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
13. Parents initiate as many comments as other conference participants.	1	2	3	4
14. Some special education teachers present conference participants with previously written IEP goals/objectives.	1	2	3	4
15. Parents want to be informed/knowledgable about their child's educational program, but do not prefer participating in the development of the IEP.	1	2	3	4
16. Most parents have a high degree of clarity regarding their child's handicapping condition.	1	2	3	4
17. Parents speak as much or more than the special education teacher during the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
18. From your experience, parent participation is fostered to the degree necessary to obtain the parent signature.	1	2	3	4
19. Parents ask relatively few questions during the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
20. Parents generally take an inactive role in the decision making process during the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4

Please continue

SECTION II

Instructions:
The following are statements regarding professional training and the special education teacher's role in facilitating the IEP conference. In this section, please indicate the extent to which you have received training in the following areas by circling a response on column A. Then indicate the extent to which you feel such training is needed for special education teachers to enhance parent participation during the IEP conference by circling a response in column B. You will then be asked to prioritize the top three areas of training needed from the training options presented on pages 3 & 4.

	COLUMN A TRAINING				COLUMN B TRAINING NEEDED			
	NO TRAINING		MUCH TRAINING		NO NEED		GREAT NEED	
WORKING WITH PARENTS								
1. Specific skills/strategies in conducting parent conference.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
2. Your role in communicating/working with parents.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
3. Human relations skills.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
4. Fostering active parent participation during conferences.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
5. Helping parents to understand their role and responsibility at the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
6. Utilizing appropriate resources; support personnel, research.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
7. Other (Please specify) _____ _____	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
COMMUNICATION								
8. Principles/components of effective communication.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
9. Applying specific communication skills during conferences.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
10. Interpersonal communication skills; initiating, listening, responding.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

please continue

	COLUMN A TRAINING				COLUMN B TRAINING NEEDED			
COMMUNICATION CONT.	NO TRAINING		MUCH TRAINING		NO NEED		GREAT NEED	
11. Applying interpersonal communication skills during conferences.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
12. Psychodynamics of communication; role stability, status relationships.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
13. Team building; clarifying roles, managing work relationships.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
14. Role negotiations; managing change, feedback, resolving conflict.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
15. Other (Please specify) _____ _____	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
FACILITATING THE IEP CONFERENCE								
16. Understanding the intent of IEP conference beyond the procedural mandates.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
17. Understanding your role as conference facilitator; team management, self assessment.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
18. Facilitating parent participation.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
19. Utilizing effective resources; props, environment.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
20. Group process; group effectiveness, problem solving,decision making.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
21. Conference management; identifying meeting effectiveness/pitfalls, evaluation procedures.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
22. Group dynamics; team collaboration.	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
23. Other(Please specify _____ _____	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

Please continue

Please prioritize the top three areas of training, you feel are important for enhancing parent participation during the IEP conference, from the training options presented on pages 3 and 4 by writing in the numbers (1-23) below.

[1st]_____ [2nd]_____ [3rd]_____

SECTION III

Instructions:

The following are statements regarding potential modifications or changes in the IEP conference procedure in light of inclusive education. Please cirle the numeral that indicates your level of agreement with each of the 15 statements.

	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT			
	STRONGLY AGREE			STRONGLY DISAGREE
1. Inclusion has positively impacted the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
2. Inclusion provides a good opportunity to make changes in the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
3. In light of inclusion, changes in the IEP conference are needed.	1	2	3	4
4. To enhance parent participation, the roles/responsibilities of conference participants should change.	1	2	3	4
5. Inclusion of disabled students into general education will enhance parent participation at the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
6. Inclusion of disabled students into general education will enhance communication among educational professionals at the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
7. The special education teacher and general education teacher should co-facilitate the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
8. Parent participation at the IEP conference should be optional.	1	2	3	4
9. The IEP should be written prior to conferences to effectively save time.	1	2	3	4
10. Teacher training will enhance parent participation more than modifying the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4

Please continue

	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT			
	STRONGLY AGREE			STRONGLY DISAGREE
11. If IEPs were written for all students, the "disabled" stigma would be dispelled, and parent participation would be enhanced.	1	2	3	4
12. The presence of other educational professionals (i.e.,principal,school psychologist) impedes parent participation.	1	2	3	4
13. Only the parent, special education teacher, and general education teacher should participate at the IEP conference.	1	2	3	4
14. The general education teacher should facilitate the IEP conference instead of the special education teacher.	1	2	3	4

Please write the information requested or circle the choice that best describes your situation.

PART A. IN THIS SECTION, PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR TEACHING EXPERIENCE (TO INCLUDE THIS YEAR).

1. Total number of years you have taught _____

2. Total number of years in special education _____

3. Total number of years teaching within the inclusive education program _____

4. Total number of years in your present position _____

5. Total number of students assigned to you_____

6. Please circle all the grade levels you are currently teaching. If ungraded, circle the nearest grade equivalent:

   Pre-school K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

7. What is your current position. Please circle:

   1. Integrated/inclusive (i.e., you consult/team teach students with disabilities within the regular classroom).
   2. Resource
   3. Itinerant (i.e., you provide instruction at more than one school)
   4. Self contained
   5. Home based instruction
   6. Other (Please specify _____)

PART B. IN THIS SECTION, PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND.

1. Circle the highest degree you have received, and the year you received this degree.

   1 BA or BS_____
   2 MA, MAT, or MS _____
   3 Ph.D or Ed.D _____

2. Please list the area(s) of special education in which you are endorsed/certified : _____
   _____
   _____

3. Are you endorsed/certified in general education? yes_____/no_____

PART C. IN THIS SECTION, PLEASE PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING PERSONAL DATA

1. Gender: (circle one) 1 male 2 female.

2. Please indicate your racial group: (circle)
   1 White 2 Black 3 Hispanic 4 Asian 5 Indian 6 other

3. Please indicate your current marital status: (circle one)
   1 married 2 single;never married 3 widowed/divorced/separated

4. Please indicate in what year were you born? _____

Thank you for your assistance.

APPENDIX B

LETTERS OF APPROVAL

Wayne State University

326 Justice Building
6001 Cass Avenue
Detroit, MI 48202
(313) 577-2654
(313) 577-3770 (fax)

Developmental Disabilities Institute

The University Affiliated Program of Michigan

May 28, 1993

Doctoral Committee
Re: Jill Robinson's Research

Topic: Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Parent Participation during the IEP Conference within Inclusive Education

I am writing this letter in support of Jill Robinson's doctoral dissertation research. Serving as the Director of Inclusive Education at our Institute and the Coordinator of a Statewide Systems Change Project on Inclusive Education, I have had the opportunity to work with schools and families throughout Michigan. Ms. Robinson is very accurate in identifying that the IEP process is very different in inclusive education and that the parent role is equally different. Implications of those differences for teacher preparation are challenging the traditional system. Ms. Robinson's dissertation research has strong potential for making a very useful contribution to the field of education. I have had several opportunities to talk with Ms. Robinson and I look forward to continuing our mutual exploration of these issues during the course of her data collection and analysis.

Sincerely,

Barbara LeRoy

Barbara LeRoy, Ph.D.
Program Director

Virginia Tech
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Division of Administrative and Educational Services

College of Education
E. Eggleston Hall, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061-0302
(703) 231-5642 Fax: (703) 231-7845

June 3, 1993

Dear Dr. Whiting:

Jill Robinson is one of my advisees in our Ed.D. program in educational administration. We are hopeful that your school district will be able to host her data collection efforts for her dissertation. Ms. Robinson's study on parental involvement in IEP meetings has been approved by her five member dissertation committee. We believe her study may produce valuable information on parental involvement under the inclusive school model. She will be pleased to share results with you and hopefully the information gained will be useful to you and the Jackson County program.

We appreciate your consideration of Ms. Robinson's request. Please feel free to contact me should you need additional information.

Sincerely,

Philip R. Jones

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

PRJ/krt

A Land-Grant University–The Commonwealth Is Our Campus
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VITA

CERTIFICATION

State of Virginia, Post Graduate Collegiate Professional Certification for Learning Disabilities.

State of Virginia, Post Graduate Collegiate Professional Certification for Speech and Hearing Handicapped.

State of New York, Athletic Coaching Certificate.

EDUCATION

5/1994 Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Enrolled in Ed.D Program for Administation and Supervision. Expected Graduation data: Summer 1994.

5/1983 Marymount College, Arlington, Virginia. Masters in Education, Degree in Learning Disabilities.

5/1979 State University of New York, College at New Paltz. Bachelor od Science in Speech and Hearing Therapy.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

* Learning Disabilities Self-Contained Teacher
  Fairfax County Public School District. 1984-1988

* Learning Disabilities Resource Teacher
  Speech and Hearing Therapist
  Manassas Park City School District. 1980-1984

* Reading/Art Instructor (Title I Childrens' Program)
  City of New York, Board of Education. 1979-1980