DEVELOPING COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE FIGSBORO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILD STUDY COMMITTEE AND AGENCIES THAT SERVE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

by

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose for this study was to document the creation of effective linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. The study also reflects on the process of action research used by the researcher as a vehicle to create systemic change for the Child Study Committee.

Ten members of the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee, in addition to referring teachers, parents, and agency representatives, participated in this qualitative study. The researcher in this study also participated in the roles of the principal and participant observer.

Leadership, staff development, group composition, parent involvement, past experiences, and time and schedules emerged as themes that led to the conclusion that the barriers that were inhibiting the development of linkages also were barriers that prevented the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee from performing as effectively as it should have been. The identification of these themes led to the transformation of an uninformed principal and Child Study Committee to an informed principal and Child Study Committee. Having a knowledge of Child Study Committee purposes and an awareness of the roles that agencies that serve children and families play resulted in a more effective Child Study Committee at Figsboro Elementary. The principal in the building was the

person whom Committee members, agency representatives, and parents looked to set the tone for systemic change. Action research provided the vehicle for the principal to evaluate a problem and initiate action steps that were constantly evaluated and re-evaluated in order for the Child Study Committee to perform at a maximum capacity.

DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my dear friend, Deloris S. Duffy, who collaborated with people to make this world a better place.

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There are a number of individuals who deserve recognition for their roles and help with the completion of this dissertation. I would like to acknowledge and thank these people for their support, love, and understanding during this process.

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The Development of the Problem

Introduction

Societal changes are making the lives of children extremely stressful, and as a result, more children and families are seeking help from resources outside the family in an attempt to help them cope. These changes are caused by changing family structures, economic pressures, political forces, and fragmented human service systems (Epstein, 1995; Klingele, 1995; Newberg, 1995; Dryfoos, 1994).

Often these changes show up in the school setting, and schools are not equipped to deal with all problems facing today's children and families. There is an urgency for schools and agencies that serve children and families to unite in an attempt to cushion the pressures facing them.

This concern evolved during the writer's first year (1995-1996) as principal at Figsboro Elementary School while working with children classified as emotionally disturbed. These children created a desire in the writer that something had to be done to help them, and that educators could not solve or alleviate the problems alone.

A keen interest in collaboration began to develop when investigations were made to identify and make contact with other agencies who could serve or were serving children and families. Through personal contacts, telephone conversations, and visits to Figsboro Elementary by agency workers, help in the form of physical, mental, social, or emotional assistance was provided for children.

However, this initiation created a desire to learn more about how agencies operate. The principal questioned if a strong relationship could be established between the Figsboro Elementary School staff and agencies that serve children

and families. Because of this drive, a decision was made to complete an externship with Anchor Residential Prevention Services.

Anchor Residential Prevention Services offer services for families with a child under eighteen years of age who is experiencing family problems or who is delinquent, truant, or incorrigible. There are three branches of Anchor services.

The first branch is Outreach Detention which offers family, individual, and parenting skills counseling. A second branch is Family Preservation where the writer spent the majority of the externship assignment. This particular branch offers intensive home-based services, including needs assessment, family counseling, and teaching competency skills in parenting, budgeting, and nutrition. The last branch of Anchor Residential Prevention Services is the Co-Ed Group Home. The group home provides therapeutic residential care, including individual, personal, and social skills development, as well as wilderness and awareness activities (Martinsville-Henry County Mental Health Association, 1997).

As a result of experiences working with Anchor Residential Prevention Services and talking with the administrator, the principal made contact with the coordinator for the Comprehensive Services Act for the city of Martinsville and the counties of Henry and Patrick in the Commonwealth of Virginia. It was through this contact that more was learned about the agencies that serve children and families in the Martinsville-Henry County area and how they were organized for collaboration. The principal began to question how these services were supposed to be coordinated with the Henry County Public School Division, specifically Figsboro Elementary School. The writer also questioned why Figsboro Elementary School was working independently of agencies that serve children and families.

Conversations with Figsboro Elementary School staff, a Henry County Public School Division psychologist and social worker, an administrator with Anchor Residential Prevention Services, and the coordinator for the Comprehensive Services Act produced a view of the present relationship being fragmented. This inquiry helped the principal attempt to form and analyze how a collaborative relationship could be developed between the Figsboro Elementary School and agencies that serve children and families.

The Commonwealth of Virginia requires that a Child Study Committee be established in each public school to assist students who are experiencing academic/developmental, behavioral, or social/emotional problems in the school setting. Conversations with Virginia Tech colleagues led the principal to question why the Child Study Committee at Figsboro Elementary School could not be the starting point for this collaborative effort.

Statement of the Problem

There is a fragmented relationship between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. According to the Child Study procedures as established by the Virginia Department of Education (1993), agencies and Child Study Committees should work together to provide services for children that are in need of academic/developmental, behavioral, and social/emotional services. As a result of this fragmentation, children at Figsboro Elementary School were not receiving the appropriate assistance needed to ensure success in school.

Purpose for the Study

The purpose for this study was to describe the building of effective linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families and to reflect on the use of action research by the researcher as a vehicle to create systemic change for the Figsboro

Elementary School Child Study Committee.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of the current linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families?
2. What barriers are inhibiting collaboration between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families?
3. What strategies were identified or used to minimize the impact of barriers to collaboration?
4. What new linkages were created?
5. What skills were acquired by the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee participants in order to implement action research in the Figsboro Elementary School setting for systemic change?

Significance of the Study

The resulting collaborative efforts increased knowledge and understanding of group process for both the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. In addition, improved practice, theoretical understanding, and professional development emerged for both groups. This study may provide other schools with a framework for creating linkages that the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee used to create linkages for systemic change.

Lastly, though certainly not of less importance, children benefitted as the Child Study Committee developed strategies, interventions, and preventive measures to ensure academic/developmental, behavioral, and social/emotional needs were addressed.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as they apply to this study:

Action Research:

A study involving voluntary participants in the school setting whose goal is to improve instruction as a result of fact-finding, taking action, and fact-finding about the results of the action taken (Calhoun, 1994).

Community/Family Service Agency:

"A non-profit agency which promotes independence and self-sufficiency through direct service, advocacy, and linkage to residents who are in economic, physical, or social need" (National Rural Development Partnership, 1997, On-line).

Effectiveness/Successful:

"The degree to which a group's productive output (its products, services, or decision) meets the standards of quantity, quality, and timeliness of the people who receive, review, and/or use that output; The degree to which the process of carrying out the work enhances the capability of members to work together interdependently in the future; The degree of which the group experience contributes to the growth and personal well-being of team members" (Hackman, 1990, pp. 6-7).

Linkage:

"The manner or style of being fitted together or united: the quality or state of being linked" (Gove, 1981, p. 1317).

Process:

"How the team functions, what is happening to and between group members (i.e. leadership struggle, communication, and decision-making skills)" (Hensey, 1992, p. 31).

Support:

> "To uphold by aid, countenance, or adherence: actively promote the interests or cause of" (Gove, 1981, p. 2297).

Team/Group:

> "Any group of people who need each other to accomplish results" (Senge, 1990, p. 354).

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Mandated State or Federal Services

It was necessary to have an understanding of the relationship between existing federal or state mandated programs and what services could be utilized by Virginia's public schools. These existing programs provided the foundation for developing collaboration between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families.

Comprehensive Services Act for At-Risk Youth and Families

A study conducted in Virginia in 1990 targeting at-risk children and families resulted in the Virginia Comprehensive Services Act (CSA) which became law in July, 1993. The study began in the spring of 1990 when the Secretaries of Health and Human Resources, Public Safety, and Education formed a "cross-secretarial interagency council to recommend changes to the service delivery system for severely emotionally and/or behavorially disturbed children" (Commonwealth of Virginia, 1993, p. v).

The Virginia Department of Planning and Budgeting conducted the 1990 *Study of Children's Residential Services*. The study recommended expanding community-based nonresidential services, improving interagency collaboration and service delivery, and adapting the state's funding policies and management systems.

In 1991, the Council on Community Services stated that the Commonwealth of Virginia would "have to spend $42 million in new funds to maintain the current level of services and that this same rate of growth will continue throughout the decade unless actions are taken to intervene earlier with families and to control escalating costs" (Commonwealth of Virginia, 1993, p. vi). Former Governor Douglas Wilder and the 1991 General Assembly appropriated

more than $2.4 million for the fiscal year 1991-1992 to start dealing with issues of family intervention and escalating costs. The result was that the appropriation would be combined with existing agency funds to underwrite demonstration projects to test the process and feasibility of building community-based, collaborative systems of care (McMenamin, 1996).

The coordinator for the Comprehensive Services Act (CSA) was hired in May, 1992 for the city of Martinsville and the counties of Henry and Patrick. This was before the CSA became law in July, 1993. In an interview with the CSA coordinator, he told of impacts the CSA has had on providing services to at-risk and troubled youth and families.

The CSA mandated that interagency funds which include school districts, social services, court services, and community services be lumped into one fund. The responsibility of the CSA coordinator was to coordinate with involved community/family service agencies appropriate and effective means of distributing the monies. The target was to help as many children and families as possible.

The CSA coordinator shared two success stories in his role as CSA coordinator. In one case, a nineteen-year-old youth from the Martinsville-Henry County area had been institutionalized since the age of two for a specific disability. Prior funding for this youngster was appropriated at over $100,000 per year. The CSA coordinator hired this child's teacher at the institution at a cost of $2,000 a month to relocate to the Martinsville-Henry County area. This action enabled the child to receive services at an area residential facility that was established and allowed three additional youths to return to the area. As a result, previously appropriated funding could be used to help additional youth and families.

An additional success for the Martinsville-Henry County area was the opening of a day school in the fall of 1997. Prior to this initiative, students were attending a day school approximately fifty to sixty miles away. Transportation costs and time for identified youth have been cut because of the opening of the facility (Interview with CSA Coordinator, May 29, 1997).

The CSA is responsible for the establishment of the Community Policy and Management Team (CPMT) and the Family Assessment Planning Team (FAPT). The CPMT is responsible for the implementation of policies while the FAPT is responsible for individual planning for students.

Child Study Committee

The Child Study Committee (CSC) was mandated by the Virginia Department of Education in 1993 to be in existence in each public school. The purpose is to assist school personnel in helping students who are having academic/developmental, behavioral, and social/emotional difficulties in the school setting (Virginia Department of Education, 1993, p. 2). Children who are included are those whose needs range from mild accommodation to extensive intervention. Membership to the CSC include the referring source, teachers, the principal or designee, and specialists with expertise in areas such as gifted education, reading, special education, curriculum, Chapter 1, at-risk programs, or pupil personnel services. Other members should include a student's parents or guardians and individuals with specialized training or specific knowledge related to the student's needs. These persons might include (but are not limited to) occupational therapists, speech/language pathologists, school social workers, and medical personnel (Virginia Department of Education, 1993).

According to the Virginia Department of Education (1993), the process to be used by the Child Study Committee is very clear. In order to fulfill its role as a problem-solving committee, the members must:

> ..... analyze problems (e.g. academic/developmental, behavioral, social/emotional) negatively affecting the child's performance/development by reviewing existing information; generate possible solutions for the identified problems; create a plan for implementing the success of the interventions; establish a method to monitor the success of the interventions; appoint a case manager/service coordinator to facilitate implementation and evaluation of the effectiveness of the recommended solutions; and review the child's progress and make adjustments or referrals as needed (p. 4).

The Child Study Committee makes recommendations regarding services for students. These recommendations may be made to the Family Assessment Planning Team when interventions produced by the Child Study Committee have been exhausted.

Family Assessment Planning Team

The Family Asssessment Planning Team (FAPT) is a collaborative system of services and funding mandated by the Comprehensive Services Act for At-Risk Youth and Families. The FAPT is intended to be child centered, family focused, and community based. Its members is composed of local school division staff, health department, community services board, court service unit, and social services agency as well as a parent and private provider (i.e. hospital, institution). FAPT has the "responsibility for assessing the strengths and needs of troubled youth and families and identifying and determining the complement of services required to meet the unique needs of youth" (Virginia Department of Education, 1993, p. 10).

The Virginia Department of Education (1993) stated that the procedures for referral to the FAPT are set by the local Community Policy and Management Team (CPMT). The CPMT is composed of representatives of the same agencies as FAPT, a parent and private service provider, and the Superintendent or

designee representing the school division.

It has been determined by the Virginia Department of Education (1993) that many students who are referred to the FAPT require multiple agencies to intervene. Recommendations to coordinate the efforts of the CSC and the FAPT will result in more effective services for identified students. The Virginia Department of Education (1993) said that "at a minimum, information should be shared across groups, but it would be beneficial if a member of one group could participate in the meetings of the other group" (p. 10).

The Need for Collaboration

"American schools are failing because they cannot meet the complex needs of today's students" (Dryfoos, 1994, p. xv). This is a powerful statement. In the last decade of the twentieth century "the family structure is comprised of three-fourths of mothers of school-age children in the labor force, up from about half in 1970, with one in four children living in families with only one parent, more than double the rate of two decades ago" (Dryfoos, 1994, p. 1). Furthermore, the pressure of declining economic conditions, housing, and insurance costs are causing additional pressures for two-parent families. The number of families living in poverty in 1991 had risen twenty-two percent since 1965 with more than fourteen million children living in families below the poverty line (Garbarino, 1997). More than fifty-five percent of children living in households with only their mothers are described as the most deprived of all (Dryfoos, 1994; Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 1993). Scherer (1996), Decker and Boo (1995), and Melaville, Blank, and Asayesh (1993) reported findings similar to those of Dryfoos.

Children identified as "high-risk" include those lacking parental nurturing and attention. Parents of high-risk children are sometimes overly permissive or absent, are suffering from substance abuse, are poor role models, and are sometimes negligent or abusive. Children cannot grow to become responsible and

productive adults in unhealthy and dangerous environments (U. S. Department of Education, 1996a; Dryfoos, 1994). Don Davies and Joyce Epstein, Co-Directors of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning, stated that partnerships between schools, families, and communities can improve academic achievement and social success for all students. Shared responsibility for children's future success depends on schools' programs which provide linkages for children and families to connect with community and support services (Center on Families, Communities, and Children's Learning, 1996).

Implications for Children

Children under stress may begin to "act out" in several forms. They may become aggressive, truant, destructive, and exhibit behavior disorders (U. S. Department of Education, 1996b). Unhealthy relationships develop between and among children who exhibit these behaviors. Peer pressure causes children to deviate from socially acceptable behaviors. Evidence shows that many of these children are frequently depressed and may become suicidal. Children are sometimes fearful of their own safety as well as that of their families (Dryfoos, 1994).

Implications for Schools

According to Dryfoos (1994), "the most recognizable symptom of high-risk status is school failure and these children are 'at risk' because they live in high-risk environments" (p. 4). Schools today are faced with an increasing enrollment of "at risk" students with social, emotional, and health handicaps. Schools lack the necessary resources to address all of the problems that accompany children as they enter school doors (Decker & Boo, 1995; Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 1993).

Community/Family Service Agencies

Community/family service agencies are in the business of serving children and families. However, there are several notable concerns to address. Melmotte (1979) conducted a study that revealed social workers did not take school or education into account when studying placement decisions relative to a total of fifty-six children entering care over a period of two months. This study was confirmed by a much larger study that revealed that of two hundred eighty-five objectives used in determining placement listed by social workers, only sixteen related to education (Knapp & Lewis, 1985). It is noteworthy to mention that even when social workers are aware of children's right to education, they often feel helpless due to the power of the educational system (Carlen, Gleeson, & Wardhaugh, 1992).

Melaville et al. (1993) said that the current system remains unable to meet the needs of children and families due to a lack of functional communication among various public and private agencies comprising it. Some services are not acceptable to families who must use them (i.e. court directed appointments), and some families choose not to use services for fear of losing control over their own lives. In many cases, services are criticized because the focus targets the weaknesses of the family rather than the strengths. This creates a lack of partnership between services and families.

Agency employees have a tremendous caseload with little control over with whom they work, for how long, and the services they can provide. Budget cuts continue to mount in settings where judgement is made by the quantity of services rather than the quality of services (Dryfoos, 1994; Fertman, 1993).

Agencies are also under fire for not offering preventive services, thus limiting the development of children and functioning of families (Fertman, 1993). Under the current system, children and families needing help are often not getting

what they need. Because of little communication and even less coordination among people working in separate agencies, each remains unaware of other professionals providing services to a targeted family.

There are existing state and federal programs in place. Therefore, schools and agencies that serve children and families should collaborate for more effective utilization of services. Interagency collaboration provides models that allow for optimum collaborative success.

Interagency Collaboration

Immediate change is necessary for families and schools to more successfully raise and educate all children. Building collaborative relationships could help schools and agencies that serve children and families provide support for one another. In addition, the collaborative relationship could create more effective services for youth (Dryfoos, 1994; Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 1993; Fertman, 1993).

Advocates for educational reform suggest that more comprehensive, collaborative, and unfragmented services are necessary to address the needs of children and families. Kirst (1991) said that a "complete overhaul" is needed to provide comprehensive services to children. In order to accomplish this task, public and private organizations must come together to form collaborative relationships.

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) defined collaboration as "a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals" (p. 39). Successful collaboration between schools and community agencies requires considerable thought,
preparation, and effort. Community, agency, and school collaboration is a continuum of relationships which support mutual needs. The commonality for agencies and schools already in place is that both are serving and supporting

children and families (Epstein, 1995; Griffiths & Parker-Jenkins, 1994; Fertman, 1993).

Collaboration has been recognized by human service agencies, government, and community organizations for many years. Although collaboration has not been practiced to the maximum degree, lack of funding and mandates have caused many organizations to reconsider the possibility of working with others to achieve a common goal.

There are many benefits resulting from collaboration, which include cost efficiency by pooling resources (i.e. funding and efforts) to address a common concern. Although pooling funds is not a substitute for adequate funding, collaboration allows organizations to creatively develop strategies that will get the job done (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992).

Although funding and mandates sometimes necessitate collaborative relationships, many organizations believe that collaboration is essential to attain certain results. More and more states are cognizant that the educational system will be strengthened through collaborative efforts. In the long-term, this means students growing up to become responsible and productive adults (Epstein, 1995).

According to Epstein (1995) and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (1993), additional benefits of collaboration include improved school programs and school climate, provision of family services and support, an increase in parents' skills and leadership, connecting families with others in the community, and helping educators work with children. Collaboration opens the door to develop strategies and plan programs that best serve students.

Full-Service Schools

Dryfoos (1994) spoke of integrating interventions in education, health, and social services as a means of responding to the problems of youth and families. School-based clinics have been one response to address the changing needs of

children and families (Epstein, 1995; Klingele, 1995; Newberg, 1995; Dryfoos, 1994). Full-service schools are "schools in which health, mental health, social, and/or family services may be co-located, depending of the needs of the particular school and community" (Dryfoos, 1994, p. xvi). Health screening, psychological counseling, drug prevention, and parent education are several services that could be offered within one school setting. The vision for full-service schools is to ensure that children grow up to be responsible, productive, and fully participating members of society. This vision involves the integration of educational, health, and social welfare services.

There are two exemplary schools that Dryfoos (1994) described as "starting from scratch". Both schools are located in poverty areas of primarily disadvantaged Hispanic families. The educational experiences of the students were enhanced due to a restructuring of leadership and facilities. Salome Urena Middle Academies (SUMA) is the first school that Dryfoos (1994) described. It is a middle school in Washington Heights, New York that began when the Children's Aide Society (CAS) began working with the New York City School System. The school building is open all days and evenings as well as weekends and summers. Services provided include a challenging educational program, after-school enrichment, health and social services, and community education. This "settlement house in a school" was initiated by a community social service agency and was funded through foundations.

Hanshaw Middle School in Modesto, California is the second exemplary school that Dryfoos (1994) described. It developed as a result of the vision that Chuck Vidal, the principal, had of making the school more responsive to community needs. Academic and environmental initiatives were established as well as partnership initiatives with a mental health clinician, a part-time student assistance coordinator, and a DARE (police) officer. The Modesto City School

System provided a part-time psychologist, a school nurse, three migrant education supportive services aides, and a supervisor.

The Stuart Foundation provided a grant to the Modesto City Schools in 1991 which resulted with The Healthy Start Support Services for Children Act. This California legislature established "innovative, comprehensive, school-based or school-linked health, social, and academic support services throughout the state" (Dryfoos, 1994, p. 112). State funds are used for a project coordinator, a neighborhood services worker, and a youth development worker. The Healthy Start grant made this service possible.

Existing Collaborative Partnerships

There are several states and localities that have created interventions through collaborative relationships formed between schools and public health and social service agencies. "Schools of the Twenty-First Century" was created by Edward Zigler of Yale University. This intervention links family support systems and child care systems with schools as the community centers. Zigler (1990) stated that the community already owns the buildings which offer full-day child care with "developmentally appropriate services" for children three to five years of age.

Stein (1996) spoke of positive results for students at O'Farrell Community School when a close collaboration was formed between school and social service agencies. "All social/emotional needs are handled within the educational families or by the Family Support Services Programs, which is funded partly by the school and partly by the county department of social services" (p. 29). Murray Head Start in Murray, Kentucky, and Inn-Circle in Cedar Rapids, Iowa developed programs that integrate families into wider communities. Both programs have brought community resources into their own programs in efforts to better serve children and parents (Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). "Murray seeks to broaden its

community outreach and enrich its service offerings through formal collaborations with public schools, while Inn-Circle strives to balance formal support services with non-institutional, informal community involvement" (Replogle, 1994, p. 32). In addition, the Kentucky Integrated Delivery Systems (KIDS) collaboration has helped Murray achieve "smoother service delivery, fewer caseloads, and more service offerings" (Replogle, 1994, p. 32).

Stone (1995) stated that the Hamilton Center began at Hamilton Elementary School where school and human service workers are co-located. This initiation by the San Diego, California City Schools and the county of San Diego included the San Diego Housing Commission, San Diego State University, and area health care providers. Their goals were to design a program for joint delivery services that would meet certain objectives: "coordination of services, a focus on families, an emphasis on prevention in services for young children, the repositioning of resources for higher-quality services at a lower cost, and a capacity for replication" (Stone, 1995, p. 795).

The School-Based Youth Services Program (SBYSP) in New Jersey is cited by researchers as the model program for other communities and states. SBYSP is "one-stop shopping" offering health and social services programs located in schools. The program received the "Innovations in State and Local Government" award in 1991 as being in the nation's top ten innovative programs (Dryfoos, 1994).

School-based health services have been supported by the Georgia Department of Human Resources since 1987. Health, mental health, substance abuse, mental retardation, and children's services are provided. The Diversified Agencies Involved in Serving Youth (DAISY) model was replicated, proving itself effective in reducing the teen pregnancy rate and school dropout rate in fourteen sites throughout the state (Dryfoos, 1994).

There are existing state and federal programs which provide schools and community/family services a foundation for collaboration. Effective models are in place. The focus turns in the direction of the change process to build the collaborative relationship. Leadership, action research, teams, team effectiveness, and factors that may influence successful collaboration are discussed as components of systemic change.

Change Process

Helping children succeed at more challenging standards is becoming increasingly difficult for educators today. "If the capacity of the education system is insufficient for accomplishing a desired goal, capacity may be increased by improving performance of workers by restructuring how services are delivered" (O'Day, Goertz, & Floden, 1995, p. 1).

Archer and Wood (1996) stated that organizational structures must be changed in order to move forward. There must be a philosophical break with the past if success is to be achieved (Fullan, 1991). Responding to, and even anticipating, opportunities can be a result of flexible teams that move quickly.

Building the Collaborative Relationship

Process

Initiation by a party must occur before collaboration can begin. Fertman (1993) said that this initiation can develop from either party while Calhoun (1994) and the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning (1996) suggested that schools must be the party to initiate the move for collaborative efforts. Dialogue has to occur between parties to form a partnership (Decker & Boo, 1995).

Robinson and Tirozzi (1996), in *Putting the Pieces Together*, stated that "although the effort takes time and requires careful attention, it is necessary to creating strong, viable partnerships that produce lasting change" (p. 12). The

process of building a relationship is a multi-dimensional one which involves recognizing opportunities for change, mobilizing people and resources to create changes, developing a vision for long-term change, seeking support and involvement from diverse and non-traditional partners, choosing an effective group structure, building trust among collaborators, and developing learning opportunities for partners.

Once the effort to create a collaboration has occurred, the relationship can begin to take shape. At this point, Fertman (1993) stated one should ask who will be involved and what the purpose of the relationship will be.

> Is the purpose to share information, generate support, join resources, create a new organization? Is the relationship an informal friendship perpetrated by an occasional telephone or note contact? Where is the power of the relationship? Is it shared between or among the partners or does one person or organization dominate (Fertman, 1993, p. 59)?

Team Leadership

Leadership is critical to the success of a collaboration (Center on Families, Communities, Schools, & Children's Learning, 1996; Shankland & Shankland, 1994; Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 1993). Hensey (1992) defined leadership as "a set of activities or behaviors that many in the group may have, in addition to the designated leader" (p. 11). The leader is an enabler of people and a facilitator of groups who encourages members to use skills and activities to achieve a common goal (Hensey, 1992; Blanchard, K., Carew, D., & Parisi-Carew, E., 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 1975).

Blanchard, Carew, and Parisi-Carew (1990) stated that skillful leaders must do more than listen and talk. Leaders must also be skillful in observing that group in action in addition to adjusting their style to provide what the group is not able to

provide for itself (i.e. making unilateral decisions that are called for in times of crisis). It is the responsibility of the group leader to keep track of goals, problems, and schedules (Archer & Wood, 1996).

The Creative Leadership System, Inc. (1993) identified three major goals for developing leadership skills. Helping leaders gain knowledge and skills when working with a group to assist in making change is the first goal. The second goal is helping leaders in the actual systemic change process to reach the addressed concern, and the third goal is helping leaders to develop a lasting process for collaboration between all people.

The role of the school principal can contribute to the effectiveness of a collaborative relationship between the school and human service agencies. Dryfoos (1994) said that the principal "has a great deal of power" (p. 152). The building site is where most decisions regarding building usage are made, in addition to communicating what is going on in the building to staff members. When the principal is supportive of the proposed endeavor and is involved in the process, positive results can follow.

Teams

Oja and Smulyan (1989) stated that "collaboration on an action research team is a dynamic process" (p. 55). As a collaborative team starts work on a project, "research tasks change, demanding different forms of interaction, different roles, and different patterns of behavior" (Oja & Smulyan, 1989, p. 55). Team members interact and use different ways to approach research as they work
through interpersonal issues and develop increased understanding and perceptions of the change in process.

A team approach is an appropriate way of building a partnership, according to Sagor (1997) and Epstein (1995). The action team takes the responsibility of assessing the needs, organizing, implementing, evaluating, and keeping the process on-going. Members should be diverse with the same goal in mind.

Teams can be built to accomplish any task. Implementing teams in an organization is more of a process than a project, according to Archer and Wood (1996). Hensey (1992) stated that the team process is critical because process affects outcomes. The team needs an organizational culture that will allow it to become self-directing. The growth of a team can be plotted through distinct stages of development.

All groups are unique. "Groups are different in size, purpose, individual members, and in the state of development as they grow from a collection of individuals when they first get together to a smoothly functioning, effective team" (Blanchard, Carew, & Parisi-Carew, 1990, p. 17).

Team size, according to Archer and Wood (1996), should be between five and fifteen members. When teams have less than five members "group think" (one strong personality can influence) can occur. If there are more than fifteen group members, the team may be too large to reach synergistic and cohesive consensus for making decisions (Archer & Wood, 1996).

Team members have an obligation to support one another and function interdependently. Groups that have the greatest potential for becoming effective are the ones whose members have a common focus. They must be groups that are interdependent with one another and may be groups that are facing tasks beyond their own abilities and resources. In addition, groups that have a means of communication and are not inherently competitive with one another have the greatest potential for becoming effective (Hensey, 1992).

Team Effectiveness

Team building, the appropriate use of groups, conceptualizing how to work with large systems, and human resource planning and career development are essential to initiate and sustain change over time. These components require time to develop for maximum group effectiveness (Schein, 1978).

Criterion problems to define group effectiveness have prohibited clear right or wrong answers. Group effectiveness is defined by Hackman (1982) as "the adequacy of a group's outputs and the extent to which group members experience satisfying relations with fellow members" (pp. 24-25). Trist (1981) defined group effectiveness "according to criteria meant to apply across the wide range of work settings in which groups exist" (p. 25). Together, these definitions of group effectiveness contribute to what the power of a team can accomplish.

The success or effectiveness of a collaborative relationship depends on the team members. Guzzo, Salas, and Associates (1995) have done extensive work on the effectiveness of "team" members in relation to team group. This is based on needs for research, theory, and practical usage. In recent years, organizations have begun to examine how to "improve quality, productivity, customer service, and the experience of work for their team members" (Guzzo et al., 1995, p. 1).

Members bring information, ability, experience, and strength, in addition to other qualities that can be applied to the completion of a task (Guzzo et al., 1995). Schoorman and Schneider (1988) concurred by stating human resources is one determining factor in group effectiveness. Steiner (1972) stated that the level of performance is determined by the resources in a group and that group membership affects team effectiveness. Members with varying levels of expertise entering and exiting a group will affect how the team works together. Actual productivity is equal to potential productivity (information, ability, etc...) minus the process losses (member losses, size changes, etc...) according to

Steiner (1972).

Teamwork is important to the functioning of successful organizations. Groups that operate effectively can "solve more complex problems, make better decisions, release more creativity, and do more to build on individual skills and commitment than individuals working alone" (Blanchard, Carew, & Parisi-Carew, 1990, p. 17). Archer and Wood (1996) stated that teams that succeed in the long-term are the teams that spend the time laying a firm foundation.

What a group does when it is behaving as a team is critical in the evaluation of its effectiveness according to Guzzo et al. (1995). They stated that "understanding when and how team members interact may be a key to describing team performance in a meaningful way" (p. 151).

Factors that May Influence Collaboration

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) conducted extensive research on collaboration and identified eighteen studies out of one hundred and thirty-three that met their definition of collaboration. Based upon the research, nineteen factors were determined to influence the success of collaboration by human service, government, and other nonprofit agencies. Although random factors have been identified in other research (Bertcher, 1994; Calhoun, 1994; Griffiths & Parker-Jenkins, 1994; Fertman, 1993; Bertcher & Maple, 1977; Johnson & Johnson, 1975), none have been so inclusive as that of Mattessich and Monsey, 1992).

These nineteen factors for successful collaboration are listed as:

- History of collaboration or cooperation in the community;
- Collaborative group seen as a leader in the community;
- Political/social climate favorable;
- Mutual respect, understanding, and trust between group members;

- Appropriate cross-section of members;
- Members see collaboration as in their self-interest;
- Ability to compromise;
- Members share a stake in both process and outcome;
- Multiple layers of decision-making;
- Flexibility;
- Development of clear roles and policy guidelines;
- Adaptability;
- Open and frequent communication;
- Established informal and formal communication links;
- Concrete, attainable goals and objectives;
- Shared vision;
- Unique purpose;
- Sufficient funds; and
- Skilled convener (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992, pp. 12-14).

Change can occur through investigating the way teams work and how team members interact together. The methodology section of the literature review provides a theoretical foundation and framework for using action research as a means to create change and to discuss case study and interviewing as the data sources for the study.

Methodology

Action Research

Action research is an important element for the development of successful collaboration between schools and agencies serving children and families. Glickman (1993, 1990) stated that continual self-renewing schools are the result of action research in the educational setting. This is due to democratic

governance, educational focus, and using action research as a tool for this educational renewal. Mutual understanding, consensus, democratic decision making, and common action between group members occur when collaboration takes place. This necessitates group participants work together throughout the phases of a project designated toward a common goal (Oja & Smulyan, 1989).

Focus on practice is another characteristic Oja and Smulyan (1989) identified. Participants focus on immediate problems. Other characteristics identified by Oja and Smulyan (1989) included professional development and project structure. Project structure encompasses communication, leadership, spiraling cycles (planning, execution, and fact-finding) and school context (elements of school environment which contribute to the action research project effectiveness). Calhoun (1994) said that schoolwide action research is a fancy way of saying, "Let's study what is happening at our school, decide if we can make it a better place by changing what and how we teach, and how we relate students and the community, study the effects, and then begin again" (p. 1). Huberman (1992) concurred and added that action research is a "rolling" model for making changes in the workplace. Action research, in education, attempts to create a better workplace and reduce isolation which separates teachers from teachers and teachers from administrators and community members. According to Calhoun (1994), action research involves a mixing of internal information (on-site data) and external information (study of literature and research). Decisions and actions should develop where the internal and external information meet.

Five phases in the action research cycle are identified by Calhoun (1994). These include selecting an area, collecting data, organizing data, analyzing and interpreting data, and taking action.

Lewin (1948, 1947) showed a process of planning, action, and analyzing the results of the action taken in *Action Research and Minority Problems* in 1946 and

Group Decisions and Social Change in 1947. This approach from Lewin grew out of a desire to improve intergroup relations within organizations and communities while advocating the inclusion of practitioners from the involved parties to create change.

Collective problem-solving and study and promoted group work through the avenues of discussion, commitment, and support during the process are emphasized by Lewin (1948, 1947). The rationale is that when there is involvement by the practitioner there is also a greater awareness for action and increased personal accountability.

Incremental progress, connection to curricular and instructional reform, and refining staff development are three characteristics of successful action teams (Epstein, 1995). Sagor (1997) and Oja and Smulyan (1989) identified three general aims of action research projects which are similar to the two above characteristics identified by Epstein (1995). These aims included staff development, improved school practice, and modification and elaboration of theories of teaching and learning.

Staff development occurs through better understanding of the school and classroom. In addition, increased self-esteem occurs due to active involvement in the research and increased degrees of competence occur due to problem solving and decision making (Oja & Smulyan, 1989).

The occurrence of improved practice takes place because of actions and results prevalent to an area of importance due to participation (Oja & Smulyan, 1989). When a participants feels that he is making a difference because of active participation, improved practice follows.

Modification and elaboration of theories of teaching and learning occurs because the foundation of theoretical frameworks allows for extensions. These extensions and modifications are grounded in theory and are “generalizable to

other educational contexts" (Oja & Smulyan, 1989, p. 2). Collaborative action research entails educators working with a person or persons from another agency or educational facility. This type of action research suggests "that each group represented in the process shares in the planning, implementation, and analysis of the research and that each contributes different expertise and a unique perspective" (Oja & Smulyan, 1989, p. 1). Oja and Smulyan (1989) stated that collaborative action research provides practitioners the opportunities for personal and professional growth. Interpersonal skills and participant skills in addition to the project context enable these personal and professional growths to occur.

Action Research Obstacles

There are two obstacles that were encountered by Lewin (1948, 1947) regarding the action research process. The first obstacle was a sometimes lack of clarity. Because there is a lack of standards, the question remains as to what can be done to improve group relations. A second obstacle was there is no way of being objective when measuring and evaluating the relationship between effort and achievement.

Case Study

Case studies, according to Hamel (1993), are the "preferred strategy when 'how' and 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). "Case study contributes uniquely to our knowledge of individual, organizational, social, and political phenomena" (Yin, 1994, p. 2). Yin's philosophy is supported by Stake (1995) and Hamel (1993) who concentrated on the design and analysis of the case study of the problem being studied. Case studies may involve interviews, participant observation, and field studies with the final goal of reconstructing and analyzing the collected data.

Merriam (1998) and Maykut and Morehouse (1996) stated that in order to understand the human experience, it is necessary that we study and investigate it in the natural setting. The qualitative researcher listens to the experiences of the participants and builds a theory through recurring themes and patterns in the data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Experienced researchers utilize a researcher's journal for keeping records of "personal insights, beginning understandings, working hunches, recurring words or phrases, ideas, questions, thoughts, concerns, and decisions during the research process" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1996, p. 68).

Participant observation allows the researcher to "understand the lives of people in their own terms by spending extended amounts of time with people in the natural settings they inhabit" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1996, p. 69). As a participant observer attempts to enter the natural setting into the lives of its participants, he will ask several questions. "What is happening here? What is important in the lives of the people here? How would they describe their lives and what is the language they would use to do it?" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1996, p. 69).

Listening and keenly observing what is happening between people and relying on emerging research design, the participant observer begins his research with a broad inquiry focus. Through the ongoing process of continual observing and participating in the setting, recording what is seen and heard, and analyzing the data, the participant observer begins to see emerging themes that will continue to guide the research (Merriam, 1998; Maykut & Morehouse, 1996).

Participant observation is the data method that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection (Merriam, 1998). The researcher's interpersonal and information-processing skills are enhanced through access to the natural setting. According to Berg (1989) and Stoddart

(1986), the challenge to the qualitative researcher of being in the natural setting is the complication of becoming invisible.

Structured Interviews

Conducting an interview is having a conversation with a purpose (Berg, 1989). It is necessary that the researcher seek out participants with expertise and experience which will enhance the researcher's understanding and knowledge of what is taking place in the research setting (Merriam, 1998). The job of the researcher is to use interview information for analysis and interpretation.

Qualitative interviewing involves a time period of one-and-a-half to two hours in length. This time length allows for "prolonged engagement" (i.e. rapport and trust between interviewer and interviewee) with the interviewee. Second interviews allow the interviewer to acquire a more indepth understanding of what is actually taking place in the research setting (Maykut & Morehouse, 1996).

In order for the interviewer to be effective, it is critical that he possess several skills. The first skill is a deep and sincere curiosity about the phenomenon being studied. The second skill is the ability to be a good listener. Asking tactful questions is a third skill the interviewer must have in order to acquire information (Merriam, 1998; Maykut & Morehouse, 1996).

Merriam (1998) stated conducting highly structured interviews may not allow the researcher to gain access to participants' perspectives and understandings because of predetermined questions. Reactions to questions are the result of structured interviews. However, the researcher's intent may be to get participants to respond to a particular question or statement.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus groups allow a group of persons to express their throughts, opinions, and perspectives in an environment where they are surrounded by others who have had similar experiences. The focus group interview would include eight to

ten persons brought together in a central location to respond to questions on a particular subject. A moderator facilitates the interview (Maykut & Morehouse, 1996; Morgan, 1993).

Morgan (1993) stated that focus groups can be used when there is a power differential between participants and decision makers. Participants with limited power and influence are allowed to express their feelings in a nonthreatening environment. The concern arises, however, when participants are allowed to express their opinions and concerns and risk the possibility of those feelings being ignored.

Focus groups can be useful when there is a gap between professionals and their target audience. The researcher can obtain immediate valuable information regarding the thoughts and feelings of an interactive group of persons. Focus groups are a powerful means of allowing professionals an opportunity to explore how a customer, student, or client feels about a particular topic (Morgan, 1993).

Morgan (1993) stated that focus groups are helpful when investigating complex behavior and motivations. Researchers can examine motivation with a degree of complexity that is typically not available with other methods by comparing the different views expressed by participants. If the researcher's goal is to modify behavior, a mixture of attitudes, knowledge, and past experience is extremely valuable. Observation, secondary data, and other sources are typically used with the focus group when modification is a goal.

Focus groups can allow the researcher to learn more about the degree of consensus on a particular topic. Group interaction provides an explicit basis to learn about the range of experiences and feelings people have. This degree of consensus in the group can only become open to observation if the researcher makes it clear that a range of opinions is wanted (Morgan, 1993).

Focus groups are useful when the researcher needs a "friendly" research method that is respectful and not condescending to the target audience. An atmosphere that promotes meaningful interaction sends the message to persons that feelings and opinions can be expressed freely. "People who enjoy each other can allow the researcher to get a better understanding of others' points of view through listening to their discussions" (Morgan, 1993, p. 17). Focus groups, however, will most likely not be useful if there are excessive tensions among the focus group participants.

Focus group interviews help in the process of "indefinite triangulation" as one multiple data-gathering technique. The opinions of a large number of group members contribute to data of other formal methodological techniques by providing a cross-reference in addition to providing an interpretative human element. Group interviews allow the researcher to expand statements made and to recognize the "indexical" nature of the respondents' statements as opinions are bounced back and forth within the group framework (Morgan, 1993).

The purpose of the interview will determine the question format. Unstructured and open-ended questions are used in exploratory groups according to Morgan (1993). These unstructured and open-ended questions permit greater flexibility in response patterns and probe tactics. However, because the role of the interviewer is passive, the focus may stray because of limited questions and reinforcement.

The first step for setting objectives and formulating discussion guidelines is to define and clarify the concepts that are to be investigated. Morgan (1993) stated "to keep the number of broad concepts examined in a focus group moderate so that each can be examined in detail" (p. 36). The basic idea of the guidelines is to lay out a set of issues for group discussion. Guidelines tend to be open-ended and seek to find what is going on. If the goal of the researcher is to

compare views of people with differing backgrounds or attitudes toward a particular issue, separate focus groups are held. These separate groups deal with the same issues and have a similar or identical set of discussion questions. Morgan (1993) said that holding separate sessions with "homogeneous but contrasting groups is believed to produce information in greater depth than would be the case with heterogeneous groups, because it is easier for participants sharing similar key characteristics to identify with each other's experiences" (p. 40). Attitudes between the separate groups can be compared during the analysis phase.

The interpretation and analysis of focus group data requires an enormous amount of subjective judgement. Morgan (1993) said that "statements can be examined within the context of the broader discussion and in light of information available from other sources based on different methodologies such as surveys, case studies, or in-depth interviews" (p. 43). Information, perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of focus group participants can provide valuable insights not available from other sources with proper interpretation and scrutiny according to Morgan (1993).

Display of Data

Data from the research is displayed in an effects matrix that Miles and Huberman (1994) described to "understand the effects of assistance supplied to a school site by various sources" (p. 94). This display allows the reader to view related variables and distinguish between two of them at a time, to view a pool of responses, and to view an explanation of each response pattern for each assistance source type. Direct quotes are not used which results in more abstract data. Researcher explanations are determined by data segment analysis and drawing second-order generalizations.

Criticisms and Concerns of Case Study

Yin (1994) and Hamel (1993) spoke of two criticisms of the case study approach. The first criticism was that the researcher can allow personal biases to influence the data which, ultimately, puts the results in question. In addition, Yin (1994) stated that in the teaching process, a particular point can be represented more effectively due to altered materials. The representation is done deliberately because people have confused case study teaching with case study research. It is the job of the researcher to be fair in the evaluation of data sources.

Stake (1995) spoke of the careful selection of a case study. He stated that we must seek to understand the one case that we are studying rather than trying to understand any prior studies related to it. Our goal should be to "maximize what we can learn" (Stake, 1995, p. 4). Time and fieldwork are usually limited as well as the concerns of producing generalizations and interpretations. Therefore, it is imperative that the "qualitative researcher try to preserve the multiple realities and the different and even contradictory views of what is happening" (Stake, 1995, p. 12).

Summary

The literature provided a foundation for why schools and agencies that serve children and families should collaborate. More effective services for children could be offered by agencies working together rather than in isolation of each other. In addition, the literature discussed how the collaborative relationship can be formed and implemented through the action research process.

The use of the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee seemed the most logical place to begin. The Commonwealth of Virginia established a Child Study Committee to be in existence in every public school in the state of Virginia. The rules and regulations of the Committee are established and should be implemented by the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee.

The methodology section of the literature review described the necessary components for effective data collection, analysis, and interpretation. These components provided the data needed to evaluate action research as the vehicle for creating linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. These linkages enhanced services for children at Figsboro Elementary School.

The design and context of the study will describe how the researcher initiated a collaborative relationship between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. In addition, the means and rationale for gathering data will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

The design of this study was case study. A researcher's journal was maintained as a means of keeping records described by Maykut and Morehouse (1996). This journal became an essential tool in collecting data and analyzing the process. Recordings and transcripts of Child Study meetings, inservice meetings, focus group interviews, and individual structured interviews were used in generating meaning for this case study conducted at Figsboro Elementary School.

The researcher was a participant observer during the course of this study. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1996), the participant observer better understands the lives of people by physically being in the setting. Merriam (1998) stated that the participant observer can begin to see emerging themes that will continue to guide the research.

The 1997-1998 Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee was composed of ten core members. These core members included the principal, one guidance counselor, two special education teachers, three regular education classroom teachers, one school psychologist from the Henry County Public School Division, one social worker from the Henry County Public School Division, and one agency member who is the coordinator for the Comprehensive Services Act for the city of Martinsville and the counties of Henry and Patrick. In addition, rotating members comprised of referring teachers and parents entered and exited the Child Study Committee as each student referral was unique. For example, the respective classroom teacher, parent, and agency representative needed were individual to that particular student.

Individual structured interviews were conducted with four voluntary parents as their children exited from Child Study. The rationale for these interviews was to collect perceptions and opinions regarding the effectiveness of the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and the degree of satisfaction that parents felt as their children exited. It was felt by the researcher that individual parent interviews protected the privacy of both children and parents.

Exit focus group interviews were conducted in May, 1998 with three homogeneous groups. Each group was affiliated with the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee. However, the committee composition changes necessitated the need to interview eight core members as one group, six referring teachers as one group, and three agency members as one group. Referring teachers entered and exited the Child Study Committee based upon individual child cases. Three agency representatives from the same agency were interviewed as a result of being invited to Figsboro Elementary School to talk with staff members about the services their organization offered for children and families. Another agency came to talk about their services, but no representative came to be interviewed. In this particular study, agency referrals to families who might benefit from outside assistance were refused or not followed through. Therefore, no agency representative, except for the CSA coordinator, attended Child Study meetings.

Conducting focus group interviews with core members, referring teachers, and agency members allowed the researcher to obtain opinions and feelings from three separate groups regarding how the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee worked together and the linkages that were or were not formed with agencies serving children and families. The researcher was able to compare and contrast findings among these three distinct groups.

A structured interview was conducted with an area pediatrician who conducted a workshop for parents and staff personnel at Figsboro Elementary in April, 1998. It was felt by the researcher that time and schedules would not allow the physician to be a part of the agency members focus group interview. This individual interview was conducted to support the data obtained from the core members focus group, the referring teachers focus group, the agency members focus group, and the individual parent interviews. Although the pediatrician is not from a non-profit agency, his opinions and feelings were deemed important to the researcher as he works daily with children and families.

Context

Figsboro Elementary School was the site that was used for this study. This elementary school is located in the county of Henry in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Students in grades kindergarten, one, two, three, four, and five attended the school in addition to one class that served six emotionally disturbed children (grades one and two). This special education class was moved to another county elementary school in January, 1998 due to special education rezoning. There was also a Head Start preschool program housed within the school, but it was not affiliated with the Henry County Public School Division.

There was an average of 170 enrolled students at Figsboro Elementary School for the 1997-1998 school year. The staff included 17 certified personnel and 11 non-certified personnel. The non-certified personnel included bus drivers, cafeteria workers, a secretary, custodial staff, and classroom aides.

Prior to the 1997-1998 school year, the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee met on a monthly basis to discuss ways of helping students who were not performing at an appropriate academic level. Parents were not present at the meetings. There were no Committee members represented from the Henry County Public School Division Central Office or from agencies serving children

and families. Agency representatives were contacted on an "as-needed" basis if a situation warranted the need. This "as-needed" basis consisted of services for children classified as emotionally disturbed. Knowledge of these services surfaced when the teacher or principal would communicate with parents of emotionally disturbed children and sometimes an agency member would contact the school.

Prior to this study, neither the researcher or the Child Study Committee members were aware of the procedures and regulations that would necessitate the need for outside services for all children referred. Students referred to Child Study were ones that were basically in need of academic assistance.

The Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee core members for 1997-1998 were introduced to the procedures and regulations for Child Study and the need for collaboration between schools and agencies serving children and families in September, 1997. The coordinator of the Comprehensive Services Act and the principal coordinated the delivery of these staff developments. In addition, the process of action research, skill development, and group process was presented to the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study core members in October, 1997. The principal was responsible for this dissemination of information. The foundation for these workshops was taken from the literature and research. Handouts were distributed and discussion followed. In addition, the principal invited agency representatives from three different agencies to conduct workshops for the entire Figsboro Elementary School staff in an attempt to increase awareness of agencies and the services they provide. These three agencies included the *Family Preservation Services*, *Citizens Against Family Violence*, and the *For the Children* agency. It should be noted that *Citizens Against Family Violence* and the principal could not work out an acceptable day for them to conduct a workshop. Therefore, only the first two agencies listed

above conducted workshops and only representatives from *Family Preservation Services* came to be interviewed.

The Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee core members were introduced to the Comprehensive Services Act coordinator for the city of Martinsville and the counties of Henry and Patrick in the state of Virginia in September, 1997. The coordinator of the CSA provided information regarding the Comprehensive Services Act and the need for schools and agencies that serve children and families to work collaboratively to enhance services for children.

The charge to the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee was to evaluate the current system of helping students at Figsboro Elementary School through the Child Study Committee. The Child Study Committee was asked to determine if a better system could be formed to enhance services for children. All core members were in agreement that a better system could be formed and all members chose to participate in the study.

The principal served as the chairperson for the Child Study Committee as is normal practice. Originally, the CSA coordinator, the agency representative, was scheduled to serve as co-chairman with the principal. Due to conflicts with time and schedules for the CSA coordinator, the principal assumed the role.

The role of the chairman was to set the meeting agenda, facilitate the group discussion, and appoint a recorder for each meeting. The principal's role as participant observer included being involved in the process, studying others in the process, and reflecting on the process while reflecting on herself. The observation notes and reflections of the researcher became extremely important as emerging themes surfaced early on in the study which helped to guide the study.

Child Study Committee meetings were held monthly. Additional meetings were held as needed.

Data collected through interviews, field notes, participant observation, staff development, and Child Study Committee meetings were reviewed and analyzed for findings and meaning. The means of gathering and analyzing data are discussed in the following sections.

Data Collection

Data collection methods were qualitative in nature. All Child Study Committee meetings were tape recorded and transcribed in addition to keeping written meeting and inservice minutes. Structured individual interviews and focus group interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Framing questions for conducting interviews were developed and correspond with the research questions for this study (Appendix A, B, C, D, E).

Documents resulting from the work of the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee became part of the data collection. Documents include literature and research articles related to collaboration, Child Study, and action research. Information related to actions taken, interventions, or evaluation of Child Study also became part of the data collection. To ensure student confidentiality, student names were deleted from all documents.

The researcher's journal of observations and reflections on the process became part of the data collection. Individual structured interviews, focus group interviews, observations, and reflections aided the researcher in the final data analysis. These reflections are illustrated in an effects matrix as described by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Data Analysis

The content of the researcher's journal, individual and focus group interviews, and transcriptions and written minutes of Child Study meetings and inservices were evaluated by Miles' and Huberman's (1994) tactics for generating meaning. These data sources and methods provided triangulation for

the findings by allowing information to be contributed by different perspectives and from more than one data source. Patterns and repeated occurrences led to the development of the themes.

Summary

A qualitative design was used as a framework for this study discussing the creation of effective linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. The use of action research as the vehicle to create systemic change for the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee is incorporated into this qualitative design framework.

Chapter 4 will discuss the findings of this study. These findings reflect the data collected through the reseacher's journal, individual and focus group interviews, and transcriptions and written minutes of Child Study meetings and inservices.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This study was designed to describe the creation of effective linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. In addition, the study was designed to reflect on the process of action research used by the researcher as a vehicle to create systemic change for the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee.

Six themes emerged during the course of the study. These themes were leadership, staff development, group composition, parent involvement, past experiences, and time and schedules. Leadership, staff development, group composition, and parent involvement were identified by the researcher at the beginning of the research study. Past experiences and time and schedules emerged later in the study. These themes emerged as barriers that were inhibiting the creation of linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. Within each emerging theme, strategies were identified and implemented to minimize these barriers which led to the transformation of an uninformed Child Study Committee to one that became informed and more effective.

This study began when the researcher questioned why the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee was working independently of agencies that serve children and families when both groups were working for the same cause of helping children. The researcher had participated in an externship with Anchor Residential Prevention Services, an agency that serves children and families and had informal conversations with the coordinator for the Comprehensive Services Act for the counties of Henry and Patrick and the city of Martinsville in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Informal conversations with a

Henry County Public School Division psychologist and social worker and an administrator for Anchor Residential Prevention Services led the researcher to question how linkages could be created between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families.

The researcher began studying the policies and procedures of the Child Study process that the Virginia Department of Education mandated in 1993. She discovered that the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee lacked several components which were hindering the effectiveness of the Committee. Recognizing her lack of information about Child Study became a strength as she began a plan of action to restructure the Committee.

The addition of an agency representative and a Henry County Public School Division psychologist and social worker was all put into place prior to the first Child Study meeting held in September, 1997. The concept of inviting parents to Child Study meetings was also in place at that time. The emergence of time and schedules and past experiences surfaced later in the study.

Staff development surfaced in the beginning phase of the study when the principal recognized that Child Study members needed more information about the Child Study process, about services that agencies provide for children and families, and about action research. The need for information regarding Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilites emerged later in the study as the Child Study Committee encountered students suspected of having ADD/ADHD or a learning disability and asked for additional information.

Action research was introduced to the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee core members by the principal. However, during the course of this particular study, the Committee members never referred to the process and did not adopt Calhoun's (1994) model of action research in their Child Study

work. The researcher believes this was due to the fact that the Child Study process is a form of action research by its own design. The Child Study process targeted identified students needing academic/developmental, behavioral, and social/emotional assistance. The Child Study Committee members met as a group to gather information, made recommendations for an intervention period of four to six weeks, reconvened to determine if interventions helped the student, and finally made the ultimate decision to either send the student to the School Board Office for further evaluation or to redesign the interventions. The Child Study process correlated with Calhoun's (1994) five phases of action research consisting of selecting an area, collecting data, organizing data, analyzing and interpreting data, and taking actions.

For the purpose of this particular area of focus, the principal became the sole user of Calhoun's (1994) action research model to initiate a change in the way that the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee linked with agencies that serve children and families. This initiative evolved when the principal recognized that the Child Study Committee was not performing optimally. The principal collected, organized, analyzed, and interpreted data and began a plan of action to restructure the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee.

Leadership

Field notes indicated that the principal was unaware of the purposes and procedures of the Child Study Committee. By studying the Child Study manual and seeking guidance from a Henry County Public School Division psychologist and the coordinator of the Comprehensive Services Act for the city of Martinsville and the counties of Henry and Patrick in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the principal gained knowledge and a better understanding of the Child Study process. This awareness was the first and crucial barrier prohibiting the

creation of linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. The principal went from being an "uninformed leader" to a "facilitator of change".

As the principal continued to gain knowledge regarding Child Study, it became necessary to transfer this knowledge to the Child Study Committee members in order to create systemic change. Interview data from referring teachers and core members found that they were unaware of Child Study policies and procedures. A core committee member stated, "I always thought that with Child Study, they always ended up in special education classes" (Interview Core Member D, May, 1998, p. 2).

An agency member stated, "I think it comes from the top. I think the school has a principal who's concerned about what not just happens to a kid in the classroom necessarily, but sees signs of things going on that they may have problems at home. That's positive to me. When you refer someone ... it's a positive that they're looking beyond the classroom" (Interview Agency Member A, May 27, 1998, p. 5).

The principal was viewed to be the person to initiate change within the school for the Child Study Committee. As the leader in the building, the principal was perceived to guide Committee members and provide staff development to redesign the Child Study Committee. One core member thanked the principal for bringing in outside resources for staff development. Still another commented that the principal was the "authority figure" in the building.

Although the principal was a participant in the study, it is not felt that she was the sole authority in attendance. Participants communicated openly and respectfully between each other as they developed strategies and interventions for students needing assistance.

Staff Development

Ongoing staff development was critical to redesigning the Child Study Committee and developing linkages with agencies that serve children and families. Child Study Committee members were in agreement that their roles to enhance services for children could not be strengthened if they did not have adequate information. One particular staff development activity occurred as a result of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) that began to emerge during Child Study Committee meetings. The principal made contact with an area pediatrician who was willing to come and speak to a group of educators and parents about the topic. Core members agreed that just having the pediatrician in the building made him more approachable. The pediatrician presented a program that was an informal "question and answer" session. Core members and referring teachers indicated that they felt more respected as professionals as they conversed with the doctor at the school site. One parent openly asked at the meeting what the school was doing to ensure that teachers were aware of the ramifications of students with ADD/ADHD and their ability to achieve in school.

There was general consensus among Child Study Committee members and parents that the inservice was of value. One focus group member stated, "It was good having (the doctor) come and talk. You brought him into the building, and there's a link right there" (Interview Referring Teacher C, May 7, 1998, p. 5). She continued with, "Up until the focus of the Committee was on other agencies (than the school), I kind of felt like I was alone and floundering except for other members" (Interview Referring Teacher C, May 7, 1998, p. 5).

Child Study core members and referring teachers were all in agreement that they simply did not know about community services that were available for children. "We're more aware now of places we can turn", stated one core

member (Interview Core Member E, May 27, 1998, p. 1). She continued with, "I think if we feel a need for more knowledge that none of us here would hesitate to pick up the phone and ask for help and what is out there for our particular situation" (Interview Core Member E, May 27, 1998, p. 1).

An agency representative alluded to the fact that a lot of school personnel were unaware of their particular agency and the services that were offered. "That's where, I think, it helps so much when you had us come in and talk to the teachers ... that they know us. This is what these people are and this is what they do ..." (Interview Agency Member C, May 15, 1998, p. 5). One agency member commented that there were very few agencies available for the young children at the elementary level.

Exchange of information between Child Study Committee core members, referring teachers, and agency personnel created a deeper respect for each others' areas of work. "No other agency touches a child more than school systems", quoted one agency source (Interview Agency Member B, May 15, 1998, p. 6).

Still another agency source stated, "I think we learned a whole lot ... give us a better perspective of what the schools really have to deal with and what teachers are faced with on a daily basis, and we realize all the different hats that you guys have to put on. I think, in a lot of ways, we do a lot of the same things" (Interview Agency Member C, May 15, 1998, p. 8).

Group Composition

The Child Study Committee embraced the concept of creating linkages with parents, agency personnel, and other school personnel. They felt that they were faced with tasks beyond their own resources and abilities. Linking with other persons was a valuable strength for the Committee. The entering and exiting of members (i.e. referring teachers, parents, and agency members) enabled the

Child Study Committee to be effective as information, ability, experiences, and expertise were transferred among members.

Parents, referring teachers, core members, and agency personnel agreed that working together on strategies with members who had various levels of experience and expertise enabled the Child Study Committee to enhance services for children. A referring teacher stated, "The whole Committee gave ideas, helpful hints that might work that I may not have thought about" (Interview Referring Teacher E, May 7, 1998, p. 1). Still another referring teacher continued with, "I think it helps having a well-rounded group and lots of points of view helping us to see it from different angles" (Interview Referring Teacher A, May 7, 1998, p. 3).

Members concurred that different areas of expertise and perspectives to draw from allowed the group to gain more insight and a better understanding of helping identified students. A core member said the following about the Committee, "I think with this Child Study, there is good representation of all the different hats in the school that make up the school. It's not just teachers, regular education teachers, or it's not all special education teachers. You'll find some Child Study's have only special education teachers on them, and that's not fair and you get bummed out on ideas" (Interview Core Member D, May 27, 1998, p. 2). Another core member followed with, "And we're all working together for the common good of the child" (Interview Core Member H, May 27, 1998, p. 2).

An agency person indicated that she was " very impressed that the school psychologist had attended the meetings and that the input he was able to give was extremely valuable" (Interview Agency Member C, May 15, 1998, p. 1). She was referring to a meeting from the previous year that the school psychologist and she had both attended at Figsboro Elementary. The meeting was not a Child Study meeting but one in which a concern regarding an emotionally disturbed

child had initiated.

Parents, core members, and referring teachers indicated that they felt the presence and information given by the school pscyhologist was of tremendous help to the Child Study Committee. "I think ... hearing it from a doctor of psychology who is trained to identify these problems as well as we are. I think it helps coming from a different source" (Interview Referring Teacher D, May 7, 1998, p. 6). Core members and referring teachers felt that the school psychologist reinforced what they were communicating to parents, thereby, giving teachers more credibility in the eyes of parents.

A referring teacher commented that it helped having the coordinator for the Comprehensive Services Act on the Committee. "I mean he was not always available to be here, but I think just finding out what his organization or agency did gave us a better idea of who we might refer" (Interview Referring Teacher A, May 7, 1998, p. 5).

Drawing on the experiences that previous teachers had with students was of great help to the Child Study Committee. Figsboro Elementary had only one kindergarten, first, and second grade and two third, fourth, and fifth grades. A small student population at the school enabled teachers to adequately interact with students on a deeper personal and educational level. One referring teacher stated, "It helps, too, to hear from teachers who have had these students in the past that they've had the same problems you're having. One of our first tendencies is to say, 'What am I doing wrong'" (Interview Referring Teacher C, May 7, 1998, p. 9)? Child Study Committee members also agreed that the nature of such a small school setting allowed the teachers to reinforce student progress through a variety of teachers.

The composition of the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee contributed to the effectiveness of the Committee. Core members were confident

with the results of the group. A referring teacher stated, “Because they were tested ... there were areas that showed up that they needed extra help in and they’ve been placed in learning disabilities services and are receiving help now and are not as frustrated and being much more successful than they were” (Interview Referring Teacher A, May 7, 1998, p. 2). A core member stated, “A lot of ideas we’ve had have worked with these kids. And we offered different ideas from a variety of people which in a lot of cases had the child improve” (Interview Core Member E, May 27, 1998, p. 6).

The school psychologist made the statement, “Well, I was reassured it wasn’t just a ‘rubber stamp’ that you all were actually using the procedures to review and try some strategies. It wasn’t just a ‘token’ kind of thing and sending it on up to the School Board Office for evaluation ... I think you used it (Child Study) the way it was supposed to be used” (Interview Core Member A, May 27, 1998, p. 1).

The input of the area pediatrician who provided training for parents and educators in the area of ADD/ADHD, was valuable to the Child Study Committee. Although his agency is not “non-profit”, he still serves children and families. He was not available to attend meetings for identified children, but he did correspond with the principal by telephone and by mail. The principal was also able to attend a conference between the pediatrician and a student and the student’s parent at his medical office in addition to attending the workshop conducted by him at the school site. His feedback for the staff and parents regarding ADD/ADHD referrals was, “I think some of the children that we’ve had referrals from, I think the input by the teachers has been excellent. The letters that I’ve received telling me what they were observing the child doing has been excellent” (Interview Pediatrician, April 20, 1998, p. 2).

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement emerged as a powerful theme early on in the research. Child Study Committee members felt that having parents involved in the Child Study process was critical to providing optimum help for identified students. Parents provided information about their child that reinforced behaviors observed at the school site. Also, the dialogue between Child Study Committee members and parents enhanced communication resulting in more knowledge about the child. "We never had someone come to us and ask questions and we've worked things out together, you know", stated a parent (Parent Interview A, March 25, 1998, p. 3). Parent involvement was seen as beneficial for parents in that they were immersed in the process and obtained a better understanding of the purposes of Child Study and the possible services that were available to them. "We're grateful for the help and assistance, truly", was a parent comment (Parent Interview A, March 25, 1998, p. 3).

Child Study Committee members felt that parents involved in the process were comfortable and told them things that they may not have otherwise known about the child. Members felt comfortable in stating that they felt it helped having parents involved because the parents felt they were involved and not on the outside looking in with little or no say or control in what was being done for their child. "They (parents) seemed to feel comfortable and able to tell us more about their children and fill us in on things that maybe we didn't know. And I think they felt comfortable because they were in on the process" (Interview Referring Teacher C, May 7, 1998, p. 2).

Parent interviews substantiated Child Study Committee members comments with, "Just the fact we had input and got feedback back from you as far as what was being done and how it was being done, the progress not only in testing her, but progress with increased efforts that were being made" (Interview

Parent A, March 25, 1998, p. 1). Another parent stated that the Child Study Committee was "very thorough, very confidential" (Interview Parent B, March 27, 1998, p. 1).

Several issues relating to lack of parent involvement identified by Child Study Committee core members, referring teachers, and agency personnel included parents remaining unaware of services and not accepting services offered. These issues surfaced as barriers in the development of linkages between the Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. There were three students referred to an agency that serves children and families. However, the parent refused services in two of the cases, and one parent did not follow through with getting together with the agency representative in the third case. Unless the parent wants the service, that particular agency will not make contact with them.

An agency member and Child Study Committee member concurred that parents need to be educated and involved in the Child Study process early on. Members indicated that involving the principal at initial conferences between the parent and referring teacher would be the most logical place to begin as children are not referred to Child Study without conferences and communication with parents. "I think one of the first things to do is to get them (parents) into Child Study meetings" (Interview Core Member E, May 27, 1998, p. 2).

Parent fear of the unknown surfaced as a possible reason for uninvolvement. Not wanting their child to be labeled may frighten parents into not attending meetings. Lack of trust and acceptance by a group of educators could deter parents from coming into the school for Child Study Committee meetings. Committee members felt that if parents were involved, fears would be alleviated. As one core member stated, "I think it helps for them (parents) to see the process that we go through" (Interview Core Member F, May 27, 1998, p. 3).

She continued with " ... But we don't make a decision right away. We try different things before we decide to test them" (Interview Core Member F, May 27, 1998, p. 3).

Child Study Committee members indicated that a list of resources could be sent home with all children for those parents who are do not wish for anyone to know of problems they face. However, members felt that the presence and involvement of parents were critical in order for parents, school personnel, and agency personnel to better serve the child.

Past Experiences

Past experiences of dealing specifically with the Henry County-Martinsville Social Services was one barrier that was found to be inhibiting the development of linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and this one particular agency. Although child care providers are required by law to report any suspected abuse or neglect of children, staff members, including the principal, questioned the credibility of the Henry County-Martinsville Social Services Department. Prior experiences with Social Services revealed that names
of informants had been revealed to family members or guardians. These names should have remained confidential and anonymous. A lack of trust was evident on the part of the Figsboro Elementary School staff. In addition, many students who were reported to Social Services for suspected abuse or neglect were sent back to the school site as "unfounded". In other words, no case could be made against the parent or guardian by Social Services.

There had been prior incidents in which staff members had reported cases of neglect/abuse to the Henry County-Martinsville Social Services and one parent came to Figsboro Elementary angry and demanded to know why they had been referred to Social Services. A core member stated, "I was very upset with Social

Services for revealing my name. I have no confidence in them" (Interview Core Member D, May 27, 1998, p. 5).

Several agency representatives expressed similar concerns with the Henry County-Martinsville Social Services. One agency member stated that, "They have the authority to do something about cases of child abuse and they won't do it" (Interview Agency Member B, May 15, 1998, p. 2).

These particular incidents provided the foundation for past, present, and future linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and the Henry County-Martinsville Social Services. Lack of trust is evident on the part of the school's relationship with Social Services.

Time and Schedules

Schedules of educators, agency members, and parents were identified as being barriers to creating linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. These conflicts in time and schedules appeared early on and continued throughout the duration of the study. There were several times when core members were unable to attend a scheduled meeting. This occurred due to other obligations (i.e. meetings) that suddenly crept up and also because the day of the Child Study Committee meetings had to be changed because one core member began taking a graduate class on the originally scheduled day. Prior to that member taking the class, another core member was transferred to a different school because of special education rezoning that took place in January, 1998. Both of these core members were special education people, and it was felt by the researcher that the presence and input of the one remaining special education core member was important to the Child Study Committee composition. The schedule of the Comprehensive Services Act coordinator, who volunteered to serve on the Child Study Committee as an agency representative, allowed him to attend only three

meetings: the first two and the last. Other obligations in addition to a change of the meeting day prevented the CSA coordinator from attending all meetings.

Conflicts with parent schedules was a concern in that Child Study meetings were held at 2:50 p.m. and parents were usually working. In an effort to involve parents who had scheduling conflicts, the principal arranged "spin-offs" of the Child Study Committee. These "spin-offs" involved the parent, referring teacher, school psychologist, and principal and were arranged at a time when the parent could be in attendance. Although the entire Child Study Committee group was not present, the plan proved effective for the students because of the composition of the smaller group. In an effort to involve the rest of the Child Study Committee, the students were discussed at previous and upcoming meetings to gain additional input from other group members.

Agency members expressed over and over that their schedules and time were overloaded. "I think we lose some time in trying to get everyone together because of different schedules", stated an agency member (Interview Agency Member C, May 15, 1998, p. 2). Child Study Committee core members, referring teachers, and parents concurred that schedules prohibit bringing everyone together at the same time.

Discussion of Figures and Tables

A "Diagram of Development of Linkages" (Figure 1) shows the creation of linkages that resulted in the themes that have been discussed. These connections are related and are all deemed important to the culminating outcome for effective services. Action research was used by the researcher as the vehicle for the themes that emerged as illustrated in the figure. This figure begins with the "Child Study Committee" and shows the emergence of "leadership", "staff development", time and schedules", "group composition", "parent involvement", and "past experiences" as themes based upon the data collected in this study.

An effects matrix, “The Effects of Components Used to Develop Linkages” was created by the researcher and is her assessment of the components that emerged as themes and their usefulness in the development of linkages and the effectiveness of the Child Study Committee (See Table 1, p. 59). The types of actions initiated are listed in the “Types” column with the researcher summarizing the data in the “Results” column and offering a general explanation in the last column. The legend for the assessment ranges from being very effective to ineffective. None of the components were evaluated as being ineffective. However, some components were deemed to be of more importance than others based on the observations and evaluations by the researcher. There was a “mixed effective” in the “Past Experiences” component because of previous experiences with the Henry County-Martinsville Social Services Department. The researcher felt that it would be unfair to declare this totally ineffective because there should be opportunities to develop a better relationship between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and this agency.

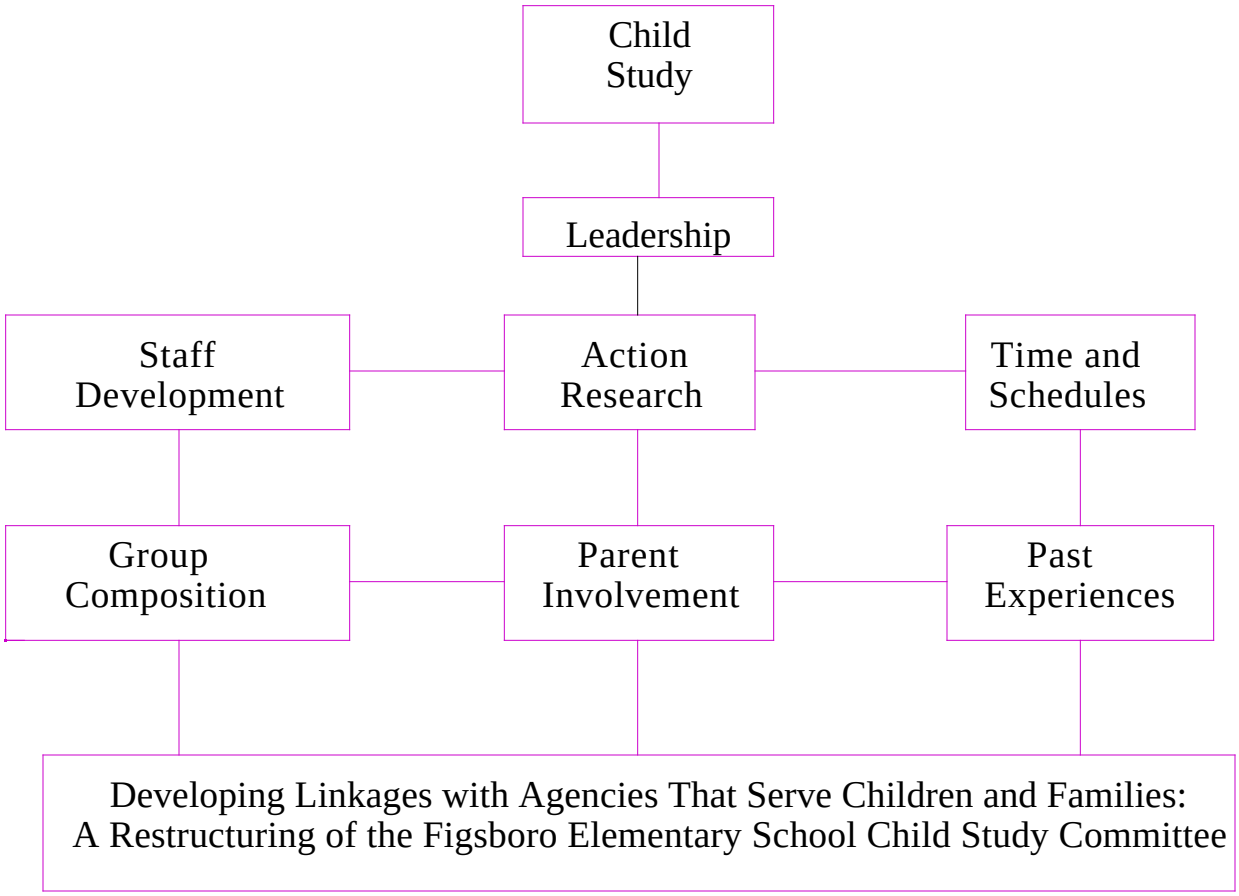

Figure 1. Diagram of "Developing Linkages with Agencies that Serve Children and Families:
A Restructuring of the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee

Table 1

Effects Matrix: The Effects of Components Used to Develop Linkages

COMPONENTS	ASSESS	TYPES	RESULTS	EXPLANATION
Leadership	++ ++ ++	Supports change Guides change Empowers members	CS members feel empowered to develop knowledge and supported as they make decisions and give input	Principal is seen as "authority figure" in the building
Staff Development	++ ++ ++ ++ ++	Child Study Action research Group composition ADD/ADHD Agency introductions	CS members gain knowledge about issues that affect their problem-solving and decision-making processes	CS members gain knowledge that enables them to make educated decisions
Group Composition	+ ++ + ++	Agency member Psychologist Social Worker Parents	CS members gain knowledge, understanding, and expertise as members work together for a common vision	Information is gathered from perspectives and areas of expertise
Parent Involve-ment	++ ++ ++	Input Learning the CS process Involvement	Parents are more supportive of CS efforts; Communication developes between home, school, and agencies	Parents feel a part of the process and not as threatened
Past Experiences	+ -	Social Services	Continued bad feelings could prohibit support from this agency as well as a working relationship	Past experiences with Social Services hinders linkages with this agency
Time/ Sched.	+	"Spin-Offs"	CS will have to continue to work around time and schedules	Time and schedules continue to hinder linkages; Impossible to get everyone together at one time

Legend: ++ Very Effective
+ Effective
+ - Mixed Effective
- Ineffective
CS Child Study

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Further Research Implications

This final chapter summarizes this research study designed to describe the building of linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. A summary of the results, conclusions drawn from the study, recommendations, and implications for future research are discussed.

Summary and Results

Six themes emerged during the course of this research project that were found to be extremely important in effective collaboration between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. These themes emerged as barriers but later became strengths for the Child Study Committee. Focus group interviews, Child Study and inservice meeting minutes, and the principal's field notes provided evidence that these barriers were minimizing the effectiveness of the Child Study Committee. In addition, the principal's field notes, focus group interview data, individual interview data, Child Study meeting minute transcripts, and staff development minute transcripts provided evidence that the use of action research had positive effects for the Child Study Committee as the Committee moved for systemic change. These concepts and conclusions are discussed in the following sections.

Conclusions

Data were gathered and analyzed as a part of this study which answered the research questions and provided evidence of the barriers and strategies used by the Child Study Committee to build linkages between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families. Using action research allowed the principal to concentrate on the creation of

linkages by collecting data, organizing data, analyzing and interpreting data, and taking action in an ongoing process. This process addressed the areas of leadership, staff development, group composition, parent involvement, past experiences, and time and schedules identified as being barriers while also addressing strategies to minimize these barriers, thus creating a more effective Child Study Committee. Conclusions from the summary of these areas are discussed in greater detail in the following sections which show how the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee moved from an uninformed Committee to the status of an informed Committee.

Leadership

The principal needs to be actively involved and supportive in the change of the Child Study process and was the one who initiated the building of linkages with agencies that serve children and families. The Center on Families, Communities, and Children's Learning (1996), Shankland and Shankland (1994) and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (1993) all agreed that the success of a collaboration depends on leadership. Dryfoos (1994) stated that positive results can occur if the principal is involved and supportive of a change. The principal recognized that change was critical in order for the Child Study Committee to maximize services for children. Fullan (1991) stated that a philosophical break from the past is necessary to ensure success. This change began with the principal recognizing her lack of knowledge regarding the Child Study process and procedures. As she became more knowledgeable about the Child Study process, she concluded that the barriers that stood in the way of creating linkages between the Child Study Committee and agencies that serve children and families were also identified as being barriers to the effectiveness of the basic Child Study Committee. In other words, the creation of linkages was only one component for maximizing the effectiveness of the Child Study Committee. The principal made

the transformation from being uninformed to becoming informed which became a strength. Lack of knowledge on the part of the principal, lack of staff development, lack of group composition, lack of parent involvement, past experiences, and time and schedules all emerged as barriers to collaboration with agencies that serve children and families and also as barriers to the effectiveness of the Child Study Committee. However, as the Child Study Committee became more knowledgeable, the Committee made the transformation of being an uninformed Committee to one that became informed and better able to work together to problem solve.

Evidence from the study shows that the principal was a participant observer in this research study. Her role involved self-reflection in her role as participant observer in addition to studying the roles of the participants in the study. Participants viewed the principal as the primary facilitator and initiator for the change process. They looked to her for guidance and sought her assistance as needed. Child Study members felt that all Child Study members were equally important in their respective roles.

All members shared ideas and information freely. However, it did appear that as long as the principal was in attendance at meetings, participants regarded her as the "authority figure". There was one meeting that the principal could not attend. As the principal reviewed this audiotape, it appeared that the meeting went on as usual with the guidance counselor assuming the role of the facilitator. It has always been standard procedure that in the principal's absence the guidance counselor takes charge.

Staff Development

Staff development provides a time for interaction and sharing between participants. Providing opportunities to enable Child Study Committee participants to come face-to-face to address concerns for children improves their problem-solving abilities.

Participants stated that they were unaware of the Child Study process and of the services that agencies that serve children and families offer. Becoming more knowledgeable in these areas helped them feel more competent as they worked with others to make decisions that affected children. Participants were receptive and eager to learn new information. They asked for staff development in the areas of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities. It should be noted that the ADD/ADHD staff development was conducted by an area pediatrician and open to all staff members, parents, and community members. Staff development in the area of learning disabilities was open to all staff members and was conducted by the learning disabilities teacher and guidance counselor.

Group Composition

Evidence reveals that good representation from different fields is needed for different ideas and information to flow among Child Study Committee participants. This representation provides the conditions for the effective flow of communication between educators, parents, and agency representatives.

Data reveals that group composition made the Child Study Committee more effective as information was shared between educators, agency personnel, and parents. Different areas of experience and expertise from the cross-section of Child Study participants resulted in better educated decisions. According to Guzzo et al. (1995), members bring information, ability, experience, and strength, in addition to other qualities that can be applied to the completion of a

task. A better understanding of children emerged as a result of various persons coming together to share information and to work together to improve services for children.

The school psychologist seemed to provide credibility for educators in the eyes of parents. Parents seemed more assured when the psychologist offered information and suggestions that backed up what the teachers on the Child Study Committee were saying. Evidence showed that his presence and title was an asset to the Committee.

Data revealed that the input of an area pediatrician who conducted a workshop on Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) was extremely beneficial. Although the pediatrician was not involved in Child Study meetings, he generously provided information regarding children whose parents had signed release forms as well as conducting the workshop. Again, his title and expertise helped reinforce the work of educators for parents as well as providing additional information for educators.
The self-confidence level of educators rose as a result of the school pyschologist and the pediatrician supporting what educators were saying.

Parent Involvement

Data collected indicates that parent involvement helps as decisions are made by the Child Study Committee for children. Parents, educators, and agency personnel developed a better understanding and respect for the work of each other. Parents also developed a deeper understanding of the Child Study process as they actively participated in the process. They were able to give input and feedback in decisions that affect their children. Parent interviews reveal that a deeper respect for the work of educators emerged as a result of parent participation.

There were three families where agencies that serve children and families were asked to assist but families refused services. One family was involved in the Child Study process and stated that they could not establish a scheduled time for both parents and the agency representative to meet. The other two families were not involved in the Child Study process and flatly refused services, stating that they did not need help. Without the approval of parents, this agency could not proceed. No families involved in Child Study were able to receive services.

Time and Schedules

Evidence suggested that time and schedules prevent agency personnel, parents, and school personnel from meeting together because of other commitments and time frames. It was virtually impossible to get all needed persons together at one time and at one place. Although the principal attempted to alter times for parents to come to the school to meet, this did not always work.

Past Experiences

Evidence indicated that the topic of the Henry County-Martinsville Social Services Department is a "sore spot" for educators and some agency representatives. There is an apparent lack of trust on the part of educators and agency representatives because of past negative experiences with this agency.

Action Research

Based on the evidence, action research proved to be an effective vehicle for creating systemic change for the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee. Action research resulted in professional development for educators in addition to creating a more effective Child Study Committee as well as a warmer school climate because of enhanced relationships that developed between
educators, parents, and agency personnel as they shared concerns and ideas to help children. Action research did not change contacting agency representatives

on an “as-needed” basis if a situation warranted the need.

Recommendations

This study should continue to guide the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee core members, referring teachers, parents, and agency members, as well as the principal in future concerns relating to Child Study and in obtaining services for children and families. The following recommendations are based on the researcher’s field notes and observation and from participant interviews collected from the data in the study. These recommendations include feedback from all research participants.

Staff development should be mandatory for all building principals, guidance counselors, and Child Study Committee members in all schools regarding the Child Study process. Additional staff development should include making introductions and forming relationships with agencies that serve children and families to address issues such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities.

It is recommended that future Child Study Committees involve a student’s past year’s teacher along with the present referring teacher in Child Study meetings. Teachers have stated that past teacher input enhances present teacher input and results in more indepth information about a particular student.

Child Study Committee members were also in agreement that a mixture of members is crucial to maximize services that the Committee can offer students. The continued presence of the school psychologist, social worker, and agency personnel was deemed to be valuable as the Child Study Committee made recommendations and developed interventions for students.

Rotating Child Study Committee members was a recommendation that Child Study Committee members made for future committees. By keeping some former members with Child Study experience and bringing in new faces,

additional school personnel would have the opportunity to learn policies and procedures. Special education personnel, including the learning disabilities teacher, should always be included in the Child Study meetings even though they are small in number at Figsboro Elementary.

Including parents in the Child Study meetings and process is essential for maximum services for children. Parents gain knowledge about the Child Study process and communication between home and school is enhanced as everyone works toward a common vision.

Awareness of services offered by agencies that serve children and families is a recommendation for the future. Bringing agency personnel to PTA/PTO meetings is recommended as a "first step" to improve awareness, involvement, and communication between school, families, and agencies.

Time and schedules are issues that can not be altered easily. However, it is recommended that the Child Study Committee members continue to make every possible effort to strive for quality of services rather than quantity of persons involved in meetings. If that would necessitate a "spin-off" meeting that emerged during this study, that one meeting may continue to involve parents. These "spin-off" meetings are designed on a smaller scale compared to that of the regular Child Study Committee and would consist of the parent, school psychologist, referring teacher, and principal. The purpose is to get the parent involved if they are unable to attend the regular Child Study Committee meeting.

Lastly, it is recommended that Figsboro Elementary School continue its "open door" policy to agency personnel. Research participants are receptive to any help that agency personnel can give to help students. Services are available to help the school better meet the needs of its students.

Implications for Future Research

This study is individual to one Child Study Committee in one school, in one

school division. However, the process that was utilized to identify a problem and to develop a plan of action could be replicated in other committees and in other schools. The researcher believes that Robinson and Tirozzi (1996) provides the best model for the change process (Figure 2) that the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study underwent. It should be noted that the unique characteristics of the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee may not allow the results to be the same in another committee or in another school.

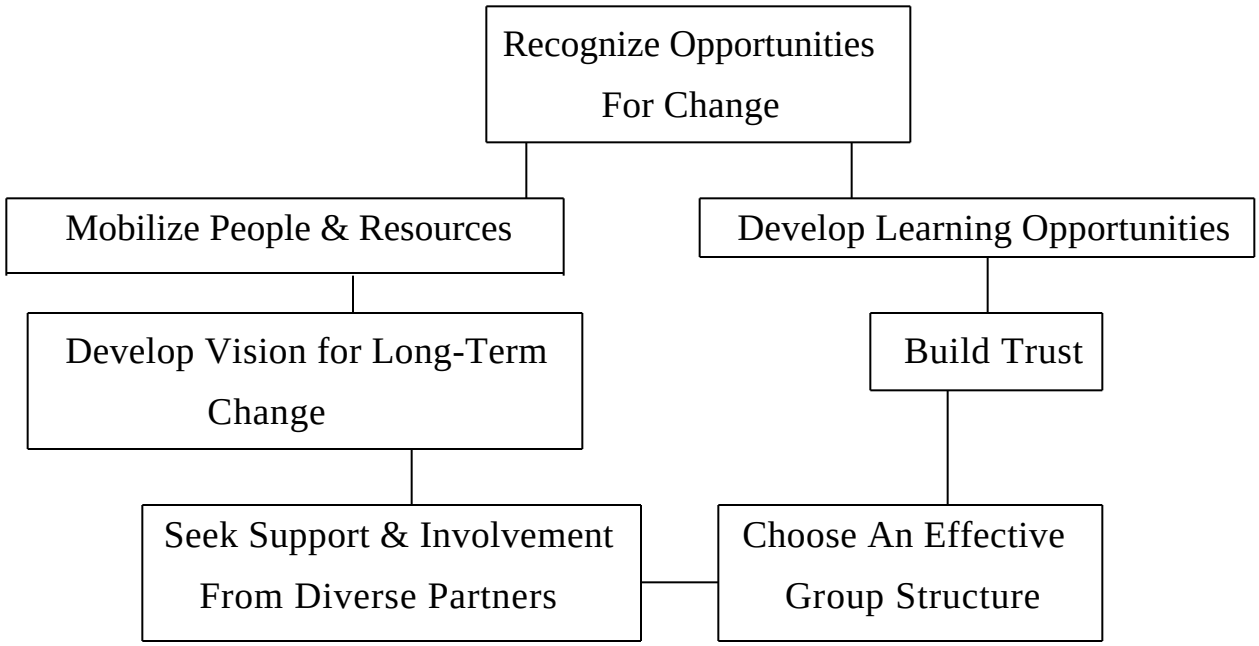

Figure 2. Model for the Change Process
(Robinson and Tirozzi, 1996)

Any theme that emerged in this study could be studied further in any other Child Study Committee. Leadership, for example, could be studied to determine if support and involvement of the building principal could contribute to the

effectiveness of the Child Study Committee and the change process. Likewise, staff development, group composition, parent involvement, past experiences, and time and schedules could be studied.

A study could be conducted at the local or state level to determine if Child Study Committees are being utilized to their maximum capacities. Are the Committee members fully aware of the purposes and procedures?

There are implications for the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and other Henry County Child Study Committees. Are educators aware of the Child Study process and how to involve and implement working with agencies that serve children and families? Are they willing to put forth the extra effort to seek staff development, involve parents, and work around time and schedules to enhance the effectiveness of the committee? Is the principal in the school supportive and involved in the restructuring? Will the Child Study Committee work together with different levels of experience and expertise to enhance services for children?

There are also implications for agencies that serve children and families. Schools can not create linkages alone. If schools remain unaware of agencies in the community, who assumes the responsibility of introductions and initiating linkages? It would appear that schools and agencies are hard-pressed for time, money, resources, and staff development that would inhibit the creation of linkages between various agencies. Who should take the responsibility to initiate partnerships between all agencies that serve children and families?

The Henry County-Martinsville Social Services agency is an avenue that should be investigated and pursued in an effort to minimize barriers between the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee and that agency. Who should take the initiative to develop a better understanding and relationship between these two parties?

There are implications for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Are there available personnel to review Child Study Committees and make the determination as to whether the Committees are performing at a maximum level by utilizing all available resources. Are there checks and balances conducted at the state level to assure effective services are available for children and families? Has the state reviewed the 1990 Virginia Department of Planning and Budget's *Study of Children's Residential Services* report discussed in chapter two to determine if changes have taken place and what to do about those changes?

Final Reflections

It is my belief that we all are leaders, and that by drawing from one another's strengths, we are able to have more productive and effective outcomes in our endeavors. This project has helped me develop in my role as a leader, both personally and professionally. I have learned that most everything we encounter in this life is a process, and that we are the ones who must make the decisions that will affect ourselves and those around us.

A common vision for students allowed educators and parents the opportunity to come together and express their hopes, dreams, and concerns for the future of our children. That vision will continue to guide me in efforts to reach those who can help children develop and grow up to become productive adults.

This experience of conducting research has been challenging, evolving, and rewarding for me, for I began this research project knowing very little about the Child Study process. I have learned to be more patient with myself as well as others, and learned not to be so judgemental about issues that concern me.

I believe that the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee has the foundation to continue its effectiveness. This Child Study Committee is willing to reach out to others who can create better opportunities for children.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Parent Participants

1. Have you been satisfied with the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee procedures? Would you please elaborate?
2. What improvements, if any, have you seen in your child in the school setting and/or at home?
3. Were agencies available to assist and help in the process of seeking help for your child?
4. How did your child show improvement?
5. Why do you think your child improved?
6. Do you have any recommendations for the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee?

Appendix B

Interview Questions for Referring Teachers Focus Group

1. What did the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee do to improve conditions for children that you referred?
2. How did working with agencies benefit the children that you referred?
3. What were some strategies that you observed as the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee attempted to create linkages with agencies that serve children and families?
4. What were some barriers that you observed as the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee attempted to create linkages with agencies that serve children and families and how did the Committee deal with those barriers?
5. How did the composition of the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee affect interventions and strategies for students referred from your classroom (i.e. school board employees, agency representatives)?
6. What are some recommendations that you have for the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee?

Appendix C

Interview Questions for Agency Members Focus Group

1. How did working with the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee benefit children?
2. What are some barriers that you observed in creating linkages with the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee?
3. What are some strategies that you observed as the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee attempted to create linkages with agencies that serve children and families?
4. Reflect on your experiences working with the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee.
5. What are some recommendations that you have for the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee?

Appendix D

Interview Questions for Core Members Focus Group

1. How was staff development helpful in determining interventions for students at Figsboro Elementary?
2. How was staff development used by you and the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee to help students (i.e. clarification of Child Study procedures, workshops led by agency representatives)?
3. How did teamwork within the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee affect the services provided for the students (i.e. expertise of members, trust, team composition)?
4. Reflect on your experience working with agencies that serve children and families in an attempt to help students at Figsboro Elementary.
5. What are some recommendations that you have for the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee?

Appendix E

Interview Questions for Pediatrician

1. How did working with the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee benefit children?
2. What are some barriers that you observed in creating linkages with the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee?
3. What are some strategies that you observed as the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee attempted to create linkages with agencies that serve children and families?
4. What are some recommendations that you have for the Figsboro Elementary School Child Study Committee?

VITA

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Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies	1998	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Blacksburg, Virginia
Master of Education	1990	Averett College Danville, Virginia
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III. Professional Education Experience

1998 - Present	Principal, Collinsville Primary School Henry County Public Schools
1995 - 1998	Principal, Figsboro Elementary School Henry County Public Schools
1993 - 1995	Assistant Principal, Mount Olivet Elementary School

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1992 - 1993	Administrative Intern, Fieldale Elementary
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1989 - 1992	Third Grade Teacher, Sanville Elementary
	Henry County Public Schools
1988 - 1989	Kindergarten Teacher, Samuel H. Hairston
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1983 - 1988	Chapter and Kindergarten Teacher
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	Henry County Public Schools
1982 - 1983	Resource Teacher, Ridgeway Elementary
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