Special Education Conflict Management at the School Building Level:

A Multi-Vocal Synthesis

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(ABSTRACT)

Research studies and commentaries have analyzed the formal mechanisms associated with special education conflict such as the use of mediation and impartial hearings to resolve disputes. However, specific information regarding the management of special education conflict at the school level is in shorter supply. This study addresses special education conflicts between school personnel and parents of children with disabilities to understand better how these conflicts might be managed more successfully. The purpose of this study was to develop recommendations and implications for managing special education conflicts at the school building level. Multi-vocal synthesis methods were used to collect and to analyze data in an iterative process incorporating results from a content analysis of previous research with analysis of interviews with stakeholders having a vested interest in managing special education conflict at the school level (Gersten & Baker, 2000; Ogawa & Malen, 1992).

Findings suggest that providing parents with evidence that their child's needs are being met would pave the way for successful school-based special education conflict management. In conclusion, the participants indicated that conflicts could be avoided or managed successfully if school personnel could provide parents with clear evidence (a) that their child's IEP was being followed in the classroom; (b) that accommodations were provided; (c) that staff were knowledgeable about providing services in an inclusive

environment; (d) that administrators were knowledgeable about special education

compliance issues; and (e) that staff would be held accountable for providing an

appropriate education and for demonstrating trustworthy behavior.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

with a disability. Although, this study reflects the challenges that families faced in their efforts to secure an appropriate education for their children with disabilities, the landscape is much different now than when my husband was a child, and the rights afforded children with disabilities did not exist to the extent that they do today. Yet, his family in these circumstances gave him the parenting and education that contributed to his ability to be a productive citizen. Each family that participated in this study is to be commended for the effort they have expended to make this a reality for their child. I want to thank ARC of Northern Virginia for helping me contact the families, and I want to thank all the professionals involved in the education for their insight into how conflicts between parents of children with disabilities and school divisions can be managed.

I want to thank all my brothers and sisters for continuing the role they have fulfilled all my life. They laugh at me, and with me, and help me to not take myself too seriously. Many times in this process, I have needed that.

I want to thank my aunts and uncles for their constant encouragement and enthusiasm for this endeavor. At low times, when I felt no one cared, I could always count on them for encouragement.

I want to thank Dr. Crockett's administrative assistant, Kathy Tickle. Kathy's warm personality and willingness to help students with any problem they might encounter were responsible for my attaining my degree. Also, I want to thank Dr. and Mrs. John Proctor for reviewing my dissertation and for their wonderful example.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Conflict is a part of everyday life (Boulding, 1963). Conflict can be found in every organization usually stemming from incongruent goals, different approaches to reach the same outcome, and/or limited resources. Conflict is not always negative. Sometimes the energy from conflict can create innovative solutions; however, conflict left unchecked can result in negative outcomes. Conflict management is a method incorporated to facilitate a positive or at least an agreeable outcome (Katz & Lawyer, 1993; Mauer, 1991).

Studies and commentaries have analyzed the formal mechanisms associated with special education conflict (Budoff & Orenstein, 1982; Singer & Nace, 1985; Vitello, 1990); however, specific information regarding managing special education conflict at the school level is lacking (Vitello, 1990).

Context for the Study

This study addresses special education conflicts between school personnel and parents of children with disabilities and how they could be more effectively managed. The context of the study can be more readily understood by reviewing a synopsis of a scenario developed from data collected for the study.

Mrs. Adams contacted the new principal of her son's school numerous times in order to improve Tommy's special education services. Her concerns were largely dismissed. Mrs. Adams wanted Tommy's programming to address his autistic characteristics. Out of frustration, she secured an advocate. The school personnel were adamant in their belief that mental retardation was the appropriate designation for

Tommy. The special education director financed an independent evaluation. At the end of the scenario Tommy was attending fourth grade and making some progress. However, results of Tommy's evaluations seemed to suggest that his primary disability was autism and the conflict centered on whether he would be more successful if his programming matched his needs.

The purpose of this study is to address conflicts similar to those arising throughout this scenario and to answer the question: How can special education conflicts between school division personnel and parents of children with disabilities be managed successfully? To put the question in immediate context: How might the special education conflict between personnel at Madison Elementary and Tommy Adams' parents have been more successfully managed?

The Need to Study School-Based Special Education Conflict

Special education has roots in conflict. For too long, many children with disabilities were denied access to public schools. This caused conflict to erupt between school division personnel and parents. Ultimately, the conflict over the right to education for a child with disabilities was resolved through the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) formerly authorized as the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 (EACHA). This legislation insured the right to an appropriate public education for disabled students and stipulated that their parents would participate in educational decision-making. Anticipating struggles in the professional-parental partnership, the IDEA established a formal mechanism called an impartial due process hearing for those instances in which parents and professionals did not agree about the child's best interest. Hearings, however, are emotionally and financially costly resulting

in tense relationships between parents and school division personnel (Beyer, 1999; Budoff & Orenstein, 1982).

When conflict reaches a due process hearing, a breakdown has occurred. Budoff and Orenstein (1982) remarked in great detail about parental perceptions of due process hearings. They superficially treated administrators' opinions, in part, because a remarkable number of the administrators in their study had sought other jobs within a year of a completed due process hearing. That fact may speak for itself concerning administrative opinions about due process hearings. Fris (1992) looked at conflict management at the school level, which is often overlooked in the professional literature. Although, he studied conflict management in the school setting, he did not specifically examine special education conflict. Cascadden (1998) and Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, and Steele (1996) examined managerial issues at the school level. Their work also encompassed conflict, but is not specifically related to special education. The availability of conflict management material addressing conflict between adults in school settings is sparse. Consequently important pieces are missing that this study is intended to redress.

There is a necessity to delve more deeply into the subject of special education conflict management at the school level. Information is available regarding the formal mechanisms of special education conflict management, under the headings of mediation and due process. However, in regard to the school setting arena, information is lacking. In some studies, principals have offered insight into organizational conflict management, embedding information into their descriptions of general management tactics in schools. However, none of these strategies has specifically addressed special education nor have

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others' opinions been sought at the school level except those of principals (Cascadden, 1998; Marshall et al., 1998).

<div align="center">Purpose and Methodology of the Study</div>

The purpose of this study was to develop recommendations for conflict management strategies between school personnel and parents of children with disabilities regarding issues of special education delivery. The intended outcome of this inquiry is to generate recommendations and implications for school-based conflict management from the perspectives of both research and practice.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following question: How can special education conflicts between school system personnel and parents of children with disabilities be managed effectively at the building level? Supporting research questions addressed the perspectives of various stakeholders: (a) How do parents describe conflicts with school personnel? (b) How do teachers recommend resolving the conflict scenarios described by the parents? (c) How do building-level administrators characterize the implications for school policies and practices in managing conflict related to the recommendations?

Overview of Methods

Simply knowing the quantity, intensity or frequency of conflicts would not go far enough toward defensible recommendations. Special education conflict does occur; therefore, it can be categorized as a social experience. Consequently, qualitative methods were considered as a possible way to provide meaning to the social experience of special education conflict at the school level. Creating a valid conflict with controlled variables

would have been difficult if not impossible; furthermore, the ethical considerations surrounding such an experiment would have been questionable.

In the course of the literature review, the sparse information about special education conflict at the school-level became apparent; therefore, a multivocal synthesis method was used (Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Ogawa and Malen used multi- vocal synthesis to examine site-based management because like the topic of school-based special education conflict, very few empirical studies had been conducted about the topic. They chose to synthesize a vast amount of writings about the topic of site-based management and treat each piece of literature as a case which they called a "data point" or "data set."

Gersten and Baker (2000) used the multi-vocal method to examine the professional knowledge base about instructional practices for students with limited English proficiency. They used meta-analysis to analyze literature on the topic, and conducted discussion groups similar to focus groups, which they called work groups, because they consisted of only professionals involved in the field of instructing students with limited English proficiency.

The result of a multi-vocal synthesis is not intended to reach definitive conclusions, but rather to garner a wide range of perspectives about a phenomenon of interest, in the present study's case special education conflict at the school level. Building upon Ogawa and Malen (1991), Figure 1.1 illustrates each data set and their subsequent outcome in this study.
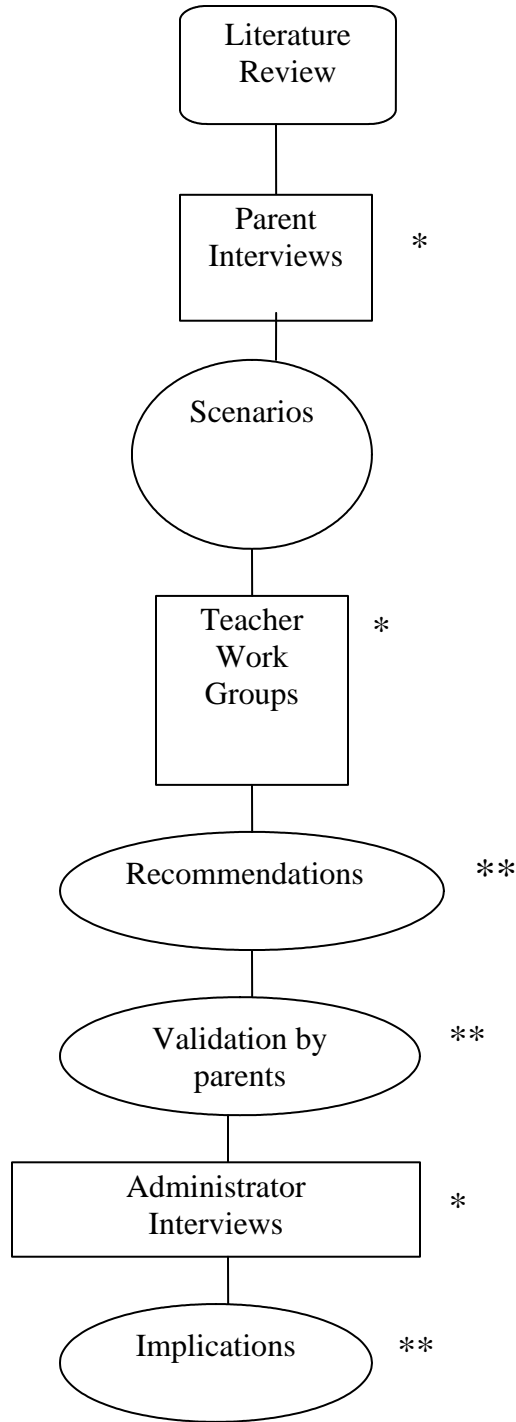
Figure 1.1. Flow of data collection across the multi-vocal synthesis.

* Items in squares denote data points.
** Items in ovals denote outcomes.

Data collection started with a literature review and then proceeded to the parent interviews that resulted in the construction of the scenarios. These scenarios were reviewed by teacher work groups who subsequently developed recommendations for the parents to validate. Those recommendations were presented to administrators who shared their perspectives concerning how the recommendations might be incorporated into the school setting. The initial literature search served to provide a data set reflecting the voice of academicians and to prompt further data collection.

The initial literature investigation produced seven best practice themes in conflict management. The themes were: (1) building relationships, (2) listening reflectively, (3) developing and maintaining trust, (4) defining the conflict, (5) controlling the emotional pitch, (6) equalizing the power base, and (7) utilizing third parties.

In collecting data from participants, the first method incorporated was interviewing parents of children receiving special education services, in grades K through 3. The parents were asked to describe a conflict that they had had with school division personnel. Themes were derived from the interviews to develop scenarios describing school-based special education conflict.

Continuing with Figure 1.1's description of this study's structure, three teacher work groups reviewed the scenarios. The culminating product was a set of recommendations. The original group of parents served as peer validators. They responded to a survey reflecting the teacher's recommendations and unanimously determined six recommendations they perceived as effective in managing school-based special education conflict.

Finally, administrators were interviewed. They gave their perspectives concerning how the validated recommendations could be incorporated into a school setting.

Limitations

Confidentiality was an issue when engaging parents of students receiving special education as participants in a study. It is public school policy that school divisions cannot divulge student names; therefore, the study consisted of a volunteer sample to identify themselves as parents of children receiving special education services. Access to information concerning those who did not volunteer cannot be retrieved. It is not possible to ascertain precisely how closely the volunteer sample resembles the total group of parents of children receiving special education services that are embroiled in a school-based special education conflict. Furthermore, the limited number of participants cannot ensure generalizability; however, through diligence in recording the methods incorporated in the study, it is reasonable to project that transferability is a practical goal.

Delimitations

The study is intentionally limited to conflicts involving children in grades kindergarten through third grade in a specific region of a southeastern state. The teachers in the work group were teachers preparing to be administrators.

Definitions

Throughout this discourse, terms related to special education conflict will be presented. To ensure clarity, the intended meaning of the terms are explained as follows:

Special Education: Special education is specially designed instruction provided for students with disabilities at public expense.

IDEA: The statue prescribing the rights of students with disabilities is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and will be referred to throughout this study as IDEA.

Due Process Hearing: IDEA mandates a due process hearing to ensure that students with disabilities are receiving an appropriate education. Parents or school division personnel may request a hearing officer to review evidence to determine if in light of IDEA a student is receiving the education afforded to him or her.

IEP: An Individualized Education Program. This is a document prepared for each student with disabilities that includes information about the student's functioning level, goals to be addressed, services provided, and measures to evaluate student progress.

Parents: The IDEA refers to students with disabilities' legal guardians as parents. In this study, the term will be used in a broad sense to encompass any legal guardian.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

The nature of special education conflict management in the public school arena bears investigation. The public school environment is the initial breeding ground for special education conflict; however, few studies have examined conflict at the school building level. Studies exist concerning conflicts that have moved beyond the school building level to mediators, and to hearing officers. Several studies have been completed that engage principals in examining general school-based conflict. It is believed that a study delving into special education conflict management could provide insight into

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practices that have the potential to keep formal recourse at bay and could shed light upon those factors that lead parents to seek formal recourse.

Vittello (1990) described the significance of the information to be gleaned from such an inquiry.

> Schools need to adopt a more preventive approach to handling parent-school disputes in special education. Attention must focus on the level where disagreements first occur—the local school level—not at the level of state managed mediation where disagreements have become increasingly tense and adversarial. (p. 25)

Other researchers echo this sentiment (Beekman, 1998; Beyer, 1999; Budoff & Orenstein, 1982). The due process hearing method does not necessarily improve education for students with disabilities (Budoff & Orenstein, 1982). Furthermore, due process hearings require money, time, and emotional energy that could otherwise be devoted to the venture of education (Beyer, 1999; Budoff & Orenstein, 1982). Certainly a better understanding of managing special education conflict at the school level could result in policies and practices that save money, time, and emotional energy.

<div align="center">Overview of the Dissertation</div>

Chapter One serves to introduce this study by stating the purpose, presenting the research questions, reviewing the study's limitations, providing definitions, and discussing the significance of the study. Chapter Two summarizes and evaluates both research studies and professional commentary related to special education conflict. The seven themes derived from the initial literature synthesis will be discussed. Chapter Three will explicate the methodology in depth, followed by Chapter Four which presents the

findings. In Chapter Five, the study's conclusions are presented, implications are discussed, and recommendations for future research are included.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review provides a lens to view how the study fits into the existing body of research. Topics examined are general conflict theories, formal methods of resolving special education conflicts, school-based conflict management from the principal's perspective, and studies providing the basis for the multi-vocal synthesis approach. The following electronic data bases were accessed to find the sources: The Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) and PsychInfo. The bibliographies of sources were reviewed to find additional sources. Search words utilized were *conflict, due process, special education conflict, mediation, schools, parents,* and *disabilities*. The literature review was ongoing, and as topics emerged from the analysis of data, further inquiry was made. Throughout the study an emphasis on the principal's role in managing special education conflict was apparent and is reflected throughout the literature review, as are studies related to the parents' perspective concerning special education conflict. The fact that only one study from the teachers' point of view emerged seems to suggest that further inquiry in that area may be needed.

Problems in Special Education Conflict Management

A legal point of view was the focal point of much of the conflict literature, both in a historical and current context. Research and commentary on special education conflict centered around due process hearings and mediation. A few authors tackled conflict among adults in the school setting, but even fewer addressed special education specifically. Much of the commentary adapted general organizational conflict to the

school setting. In this study, the theoretical base identifying conflict management themes in the literature was explored. This study then sought to determine if school division personnel and the parents of special education students identified the same themes as recommended practice in managing school based conflicts.

Identifying the Nature of Conflict Management

The sources for the literature reviewed were books or studies found in research journals. The literature included both qualitative and quantitative studies. The literature was dominated by Thomas' (1976) conflict paradigm, and the following seven themes were systematically derived from texts: (a) building relationships; (b) listening reflectively; (c) developing and maintaining trust; (d) defining the problem; (e) controlling the emotional pitch; (f) equalizing the power base; and (g) utilizing third parties. As stated earlier, few studies were found that addressed conflict management tactics at the school-based level; however, in both research studies and commentary, Thomas' (1976) conflict model was an applicable model, and one frequently cited by researchers.

Thomas' Paradigm

Thomas' (1976) model emphasized the nature of conflict in the context of relationships. Thomas admitted that conflict management is researched in specific settings, but "it is presumed here that the dynamics underlying conflict behavior in one area will be relevant to conflict in other areas" (p. 890). This presumption lends credence to its application to school-based conflict management exploration. Following is the Thomas model beginning with the identification of frustration and varying

conceptualization of a problem as the sources of conflict and moving to what Thomas

described as four types of responses to conflict.

Frustration

Conflicts begin with one party's frustration. Aggrieved parties perceive that an

individual or a situation is preventing them from reaching their goals. In school-based

special education conflicts, the parents' goal may be for their child to live independently

as an adult. Parents may feel the education offered would not result in the achievement of

their goal. School personnel may feel the parent is interfering with the school's ability to

be fiscally efficient by demanding a lion's share of the resources for their child. From this

perspective, the parent's demands will interfere with the ability of the school to properly

fund other educational programs; hence, frustration has emerged.

Conceptualization

Two parties locked in conflict view the sources of frustration differently. In the

case of special education conflict the parents' perception may be that having a disabled

child is unfair. They think that to balance the scale, the school division owes their child

the ultimate education. The school division, however, sees the dwindling per pupil

expenditure and views the parents' demands as anything but fair. Understanding the

opposing party's view is helpful in successfully managing conflict.

<div align="center">Thomas' Four Responses to Conflict</div>

Competition

Although some authors referred to competition as dominating, forcing,

controlling, or authoritarian (Fris, 1992; Katz & Lawyer, 1992), the concepts are similar.

Competition "represents a desire to win one's own concerns at the other's expense,

namely to dominate" (Thomas, 1976, p. 901). Although the term competition may suggest that one party presents a better idea, perhaps alternate terms used by other authors, such as dominating and forcing, more clearly describe the win at any cost mentality that Thomas referred to as competition.

Adopting the win at any cost philosophy is a risky stance. Most of the references in regard to this approach in the special education context referred to due process hearings. Due process hearings are competitive in nature—someone wins, someone loses. Much of what has been written about due process is negative. The complaints include that due process is costly, emotionally draining, and does little to improve a child's education (Beyer, 1999; Budoff & Orenstein, 1982; Goldberg & Huefner, 1995).

Beyer (1999) discussed how due process pits parents against school divisions and renders an unproductive environment. His stance is that in special education disputes, the emphasis should be on solutions, not on rights. He pointed out that parties can have their rights upheld, but not get what they want.

Situations do occur in which competition may be the best way to manage conflict. Sometimes competition is healthy, and the improvement of one party's situation consequently improves the lot of another party. An example would be when parents successfully lobby for accessible facilities. The outcome of their pressure benefits the school division and every subsequent individual who needs the environment adapted to gain access.

Competition can be an attractive option for dealing with conflict. Katz and Lawyer (1993) suggested that competition, and/or dominating is necessary when quick decisive action is vital. For example, a committee should not be assembled when the

building is on fire. Another instance when competition is appropriate occurs when an issue is important and an unpopular course of action needs implementation. Competition should be considered when an issue is vital to the long-term success of an organization (p. 16).

Collaboration

Collaboration was touted in the literature as the optimum conflict management strategy. "The collaborative orientation represents a desire to fully satisfy the concerns of both parties--to integrate their concerns" (Thomas, 1976, p. 901). Collaboration is the route "when concerns are too important for compromise, when neither party has a good solution and merging insights offers creative possibilities and when complete resolutions are needed without leftover negative feelings" (Katz & Lawyer, 1992, p. 16).

Avoidance

Theses sources seemed to agree that avoidance is the worse conflict management tactic (Boulding, 1963; Budoff, 1982; Fris, 1992; Katz & Lawyer, 1993; Mauer, 1991). "False alarms are cheap compared to ignoring conflict" (Boulding, 1963, p. 327). Conflict is avoided because addressing conflict is painful. Budoff and Oreinstein (1982) emphasized the importance of being proactive in addressing conflict. In school settings, if the parents are avoiding school system personnel, it is best to find out why.

Times exist, however, when avoidance may be the route to pursue. Katz and Lawyer (1993) specify these instances.

> Avoid when an issue is trivial in relation to more pressing concerns. Avoidance
> may be the route when there is not the possibility of either settling or resolving
> the issue. Avoidance is recommended when one party has low power in relation to

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the other, and when the potential damages of the confrontation outweigh the

benefit resolution. (p. 17)

Accommodation

According to Thomas (1976) accommodation "focuses upon appeasement—

satisfying the other's concerns without attending to one's own" (p. 901). Although, called

a host of names, sharing, bargaining, compromise and negotiating, many authors referred

to accommodation (Beyer, 1999; Fris, 1992; Marshall, 1996). Katz and Lawyer (1993)

suggested that accommodation is an effective strategy when:

> (a) one party has a decidedly better solution; (b) the issues involved are
>
> considerably more important to one party; (c) continued competition could
>
> damage the relationship; (d) the conflict could lead to escalated conflict in the
>
> future; or (e) lead to a loss of the relationship. (p. 16)

<div align="center">Seven Themes of Conflict Management</div>

The Thomas (1976) paradigm was the dominant formal conflict model in this

review of the literature, but authors made references to specific conflict management

components repeatedly. These components were analyzed and organized into seven

themes using Tesch's methods as cited in Creswell (1994). The initial step was to code

topics. Topics were considered relevant if they emerged across sources a minimum of

three times. Sub-topics were arranged into broader categories until the manageable

number of seven themes emerged. Chapter 3 contains a more detailed description of this

process. Tesch's method of organizing data resulted in the following themes: (a) building

relationships; (b) listening reflectively; (c) developing and maintaining trust; (d) defining

the problem; (e) controlling the emotional pitch; (f) equalizing the power base, and (g) utilizing third parties.

Building Relationships

Relationship building before, during, and after conflicts was emphasized (Budoff, 1982; Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, & Steele, 1996). Balancing what one needs or wants with preserving the relationship is not easy (Katz & Lawyer, 1993). Thomas' (1976) accommodation addresses relationships. One should accommodate when he or she does not feel strongly about the issue, but wishes to preserve the relationship.

With regard to special education conflicts, Budoff and Orenstein (1982) examined why parents chose to go to due process hearings. Breakdown or lack of care in establishing and maintaining relationships was a factor. The following comment illustrates the issue: "I requested that the school keep me constantly posted on the progress of my child and they failed to do so" (p. 52). "The school staff said they never had time to meet with me" (p. 52) and "school personnel were hostile and made us feel like the enemy" (p. 57). Schumack and Stewart (1995) noted that relationships have a future and a past and Budoff and Orenstein (1982) indicated that poor prior relationships factored into decisions to go to due process.

Budoff and Orenstein (1982) stressed the importance of mechanisms to protect school-parent relations.

Clearly schools need help in developing structures that can effectively individualize programming for handicapped children. School personnel should work to establish relationships with parents, trying to understand their grievances and helping them to deal with their anger toward the school's prior programming.

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Positive relationships with the parents should be cultivated not only to avoid the

acrimony of a hearing, but also to develop arrangements for school staff and

parents to work in concert, supporting each other's efforts (p. 310).

Budoff and Orenstein (1982) are not alone in their vision of promoting school-

parent relationships. Marshal et al. (1996) discovered that many administrators practice

Nodding's ethic of care. They have a vision of caring with its emphasis "on living

together, on creating, maintaining, and enhancing positive relations—not decision

making in moments of high moral conflicts" (p. 278).

The importance of cultivating and maintaining school-parent relationships was

woven through the literature. Singer and Nace (1985) gave examples of both parents and

school personnel compromising to preserve relationships. Parents were concerned about

how their relationship with the school would impact their child. Would the school seek

revenge by mistreating their child because of a conflict? One school division

administrator did not think a child needed an hour of therapy, but agreed to the therapy to

preserve the relationship. The interchange occurred with good listening skills and built a

relationship.

Listening Reflectively

According to Budoff and Orenstein (1982), listening skills are an important

dynamic in conflict management. Their work indicated parents' perceptions that they

were not being heard played a role in their decision to initiate a due process hearing.

Parents reported: "The school would not listen to anything we had to say" (p. 52).

Listening reflectively was encouraged over and over as a conflict management skill.

Margolis (1987) called reflective listening "encouraging the expression of critical concerns" (p. 217). Margolis prescribed these steps for conflict managers to follow:

    (a) remain calm, attentive and talk very little;

    (b) provide short, fresh, concise, reflective summaries of what was said;

    (c) tentatively summarize their understandings and ascertain if the parents agree with the assessment;

    (d) listen carefully and emphatically for cognitive and emotional content of the parent's message;

    (e) do not just listen to words, work on getting meaning. (p. 218).

    (f) Margolis et al. suggested that the past influences other's actions and encourages conflict managers to listen to other's stories. Relationship building and listening are intertwined with the next conflict management skill—developing and maintaining trust.

Developing and Maintaining Trust

Developing and maintaining trust is an important conflict management skill (Budoff & Orenstein, 1982; Katz & Lawyer, 1993; Margolis et al., 1987). Once trust has been violated, bargaining is virtually impossible (Budoff & Orenstein, 1982). According to Budoff and Orenstein, issues that eroded trust included schools misrepresenting the severity of a child's problem, not apprising parents of all options available to them, and providing conflicted information from varying levels of school personnel. Katz and Lawyer (1993) suggested making it safe to tell the truth and Margolis et al. (1987) asserted that accepting parents as they are is a step towards a relationship based on trust, as well as focusing on the parents' hopes, aspirations, concerns, and needs. Conflict

managers should be interested in parent's lives, as well as being trustworthy and available.

Defining the Conflict

Budoff and Orenstein (1982), Mauer (1991), and Kuriloff (1985) stated that defining the conflict is a necessary element of managing the conflict. Mauer (1991) suggested that often times a conflict does not exist; it is merely a misunderstanding. Budoff and Oreinstein, and Kuriloff explained the ticklish "appropriate" term in the phrase "free appropriate public education" as described in IDEA is a set-up for conflict. A free appropriate public education conforms to the guidelines in IDEA, addresses the child's unique needs that have been determined through evaluations and observations, relates to the child's potential, and allows the child to make progress towards IEP goals and objectives. Their assessment is that much special education conflict is couched in the differing perspectives of what "appropriate" means. Kuriloff (1985) maintained that many due process hearings could be avoided if parents understood their child was not afforded the optimum education available, but rather an appropriate education providing benefit, not maximizing potential.

Margolis et al. (1987) proposed that the lack of clarity about an issue is often the root of conflict and once the issue is crystallized the conflict is resolved. Grab (1996) promoted that a clear understanding assists one in determining the resources one will need to manage the conflict. Defining the conflict is a crucial step, and because conflict incites emotions, controlling the emotional pitch is of utmost importance.

Controlling the Emotional Pitch

Researchers admonished those involved in special education conflicts to control the emotional pitch (Budoff & Orenstein, 1982; Katz & Lawyer, 1993; Margolis et al., 1987). Katz and Lawyer offered this insight:

Emotions in conflict are perceived as negative, but don't have to be, they can be energy. What causes emotion in conflict? Inappropriate management, fear of future problems, outward behavior causing tension, accumulated problems over time, power building by both parties and stereotyping (p. 17).

Since escalated emotions are common place in conflict situations, Mauer (1991) suggested an open forum to express emotions before discussing the seemingly more rational aspects of the conflict. Budoff and Orenstein (1982) in working with parents over time discovered the height of parents' emotions did not descend much even over long periods of time. As a result, Budoff and Orenstein (1982) recommended that school staff be trained in helping parents cope with their emotional state.

School personnel seemed to attribute parents' emotional states to be the result to misdirected anger. The parents were angry about the condition of their disabled child and the school division was a convenient scapegoat (Margolis et al., 1987). Since the source of parental anger cannot be properly pinpointed and strong emotions are part and parcel of conflict management, Budoff's and Orenstein's (1982) recommendation seems prudent.

Equalizing Power

Sources indicated building relationships, listening reflectively, developing, and maintaining trust, defining the problem, controlling the emotional pitch, equalizing the power base, and utilizing third parties are good conflict management tactics. Conflicts

involve two individuals or parties. Realistically one of the parties will have more power

than the other (Beyer, 1999; Mauer, 1991; Vitello, 1990). The major perception is that

school divisions have the power (Beyer, 1999; Singer & Nace, 1985; Vitello, 1990).

Fielding (1990) considered the ability to take a school division to a hearing as

empowering for parents, but most parents conveyed even with the rights afforded to

them, the school division has the upper hand. Budoff and Orenstein (1982) reported that

parents see school divisions as having a wider knowledge base, and the ability to secure

more witnesses and advocates when embroiled in a conflict. Singer and Nace (1985)

showcased two special education directors' approaches to power. One stated that she

went to mediations alone to indicate her sincere desire to work out a solution. Another

indicated that she took as many people as possible because she knew she was right.

Awareness of the role power plays in conflict is helpful in managing the conflict.

Utilizing Third Parties

The use of a third party as a conflict management tool was prevalent in the

literature (Budoff & Orenstein, 1982; Vitello, 1990). IDEA's mandate to offer mediation

to the parents of students receiving special education services emphasizes the importance

of this perspective.

Beekman (1998) encouraged using a third party when dealing with school

administrators with bad attitudes, whether the third party was a school employee or not

was immaterial. Budoff and Orenstein (1982) mirrored the same viewpoint, but suggested

using this tactic when parents no longer trusted the school division. Grab (1996)

recommended using a third party as a reality check when involved in a conflict. He

suggested reviewing the issue with a neutral party prior to meeting with the opposing

party in order to attain an objective point of view. Boulding (1963) acknowledged that the emotional fervor of conflict can interfere with a rational view of the pertinent issues, and indicated a third party may infuse some reality into the situation.

Many authors stated the benefits of third parties. Third parties can project a more positive attitude, help with breached trust, and give a rational definition of the conflict. Schumack and Stewart (1995) summarized the benefits: Parents and school personnel were remarkably uniform in their response to mediation. Parents made comments that it had a power balancing effect. The neutral party made communication easier. The mediator helped them relax. The parents wanted someone to listen.

Summarizing Theories on Conflict and its Management

In summary, the prevalent themes emerging from the conflict literature include the four elements in the Thomas (1976) model: (a) competition, (b) avoidance, (c) accommodation, and (d) collaboration along with the seven themes of (a) building relationships, (b) listening reflectively, (c) developing and maintaining trust, (d) defining the problem, (e) controlling the emotional pitch, (f) equalizing the power base, and (g) utilizing a third party. Much of the information available concerning school based conflict management is commentary, in which the authors have adapted general organizational conflict management theory to a school based setting. Thomas (1976) admitted that the idea that conflict in various organizations could be addressed in the same way was presumptuous. Many of the studies concerning special education conflict revolved around more traditional methods of special education conflict—due process hearings and mediation (Budoff & Orenstein, 1982; Goldberg & Kuriloff, 1991; Kammerlohr et al., 1983; Vitello, 1990). Several addressed general conflict management

in school settings (Cascadden, 1998; Fris, 1992; Marshall, 1996). This evidence supported the need for a multi-vocal synthesis to bond the components of the school setting with the specifics of special education conflict.

Studies Related to Conflict in Schools

In order to give a deeper understanding about how others have researched educational conflicts nine studies were examined in depth (Budoff & Orenstein, 1982; Cascadden, 1998; Dyches, Thompson, Murdick, & Gartin, 2002; Fris, 1992; Lake, & Billingsley 2000; Marshall, 1996; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Singer & Nace, 1985; Vitello, 1990). Budoff and Orenstein examined the responses of parents and school division personnel following formal due process hearings. Singer and Nace (1985) and Vitello (1990) reviewed the efficacy of mediation. Lake and Billingsley (2000) interviewed parents and school division personnel with the purpose of determining factors related to the escalation and de-escalation of special education conflicts. These studies were selected because they were among the few studies that did examine special education conflict, and they involved interaction with parents and school division personnel through surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Studies that solely reviewed documents related to due process hearings were not included in this review. The remaining studies (Cascadden, 1998; Fris, 1992; Marshall, 1996), examined principal leadership issues that included general conflict in the school setting, but not specifically special education conflict. Patterson (2000) addressed principals' preparedness to manage special education issues. Dyches (2002) was the only study that examined special education conflict from the teachers' point of view. These studies are reviewed in the following sections addressing: (a) Managing Educational Conflict: The Principal's View;

(b) Managing Educational Conflict: The Parent's View; and (c) Managing Educational

Conflict: The Teachers' View.

Managing Educational Conflict: The Principal's View

Fris (1992) conducted a study in which four female principals and 11 male

principals from a moderately large urban school division in Western Canada were

recruited after responding to a demographic survey. Twenty five principals were in the

original pool, and the 15 were selected because of their gender, the size of their school,

and the socioeconomic status of the population served at their particular school. The goal

was to have a group comprised of both men and women from a variety of communities

and from schools that varied according to grade level and size.

The principals participated in 60-90 minute interviews and were told to describe a

challenging non-routine conflict. The researchers analyzed the data and developed the

themes. The principals were provided with the same interviews and were asked to

identify themes. Three major themes emerged: (a) manage the information base; (b)

censure unacceptable behavior; and (c) manage the climate. Manage the information base

is closely akin to the aforementioned defining the problem theme because it involves

gathering and verifying information. Censure unacceptable behavior mirrors Thomas'

(1976) competition element. The principals related instances in which they had set

boundaries and "put people in their places" (p. 68). The third theme, managing the

climate, relates to other themes found in the literature, building relationships, listening

reflectively, and developing and maintaining trust. Fris (1992) is responsible for coining

the phrase "controlling the emotional pitch" that describes his fellow scholar's discussion

of the emotional aspects of conflict.

Fris' (1992) study had the following limitations: The fact that the sample size is so small leaves the question unanswered: Did the participants differ from those in larger population of principals? The author did not refer to whether or not interviewing took place under the exact same conditions. The only reference to the interview conditions is that the principals were asked to describe a non-routine challenging conflict. The scenarios the principals conveyed were past events, and there is no certainty that the principal's perceptions comport with reality. Fris examined only one view of reality, the principal's view. As stated earlier, conflicts typically have two parties, either two individuals or two groups. In every instance described, a host of opposing parties existed—teachers, parents, students, etc. Fris' intent was not to offer their perception of the tactics used to manage the conflict, but to emphasize how conflict was addressed from the principal's view. The study's strength was that Fris allowed the principals to identify themes to strengthen validity.

Principals and the Ethic of Care

Marshall et al. examined the school setting, and found the factors related to conflict management embedded. The purpose of the study was to determine if Nodding's ethic of care was prevalent in principals' administrative practices. Caring attributes examined were (a) listening, (b) refusing to give up on people, (c) flexibility—adapting decisions and actions to fit the person and situation, and (d) building and maintaining trust. These attributes reflect the earlier discussed themes derived from both commentary and research— (a) building relationships (b) listening reflectively, and (c) developing and maintaining trust .

Fifty assistant principals from rural, suburban, and urban school divisions participated. Their experience ranged from 1 to 23 years. The schools they supervised were elementary and secondary across the United States, and the size of the schools varied from enrollments of 500 to 1,800. A comprehensive approach was used for data collection, and for seeking a myriad of perspectives. The participant observation approach afforded the opportunity to see the situations in the present. Not only did they collect data from the assistant principals, they elicited responses from the principals' co-workers and spouses to determine the assistant principals' administrative practices. Marshall had the advantage of having multiple researchers involved in the study to strengthen reliability when coding the themes; however, the description of how the themes were coded was lacking in the narrative.

Information from the multiple data sources was refined into three major themes: (a) creating, maintaining, and enhancing connections; (b) recognizing and responding to contextual realities; and (c) demonstrating concern by responding to needs. Creating, maintaining, and enhancing connections is closely akin to building relationships. The assistant principals shared and demonstrated that they spent time forming relationships with students, staff, parents, and other members of the community.

Recognizing and responding to contextual realities is related to developing and maintaining trust. This requires that the principal look at problems holistically, consider the impact that the solution will have on everyone involved, and try to reach a conclusion that is satisfactory to everyone.

Demonstrating concern by responding to needs paralleled with building relationships as well. Principals spoke of responding to problems by reaching a consensus

with the ultimate goal being students' well being. References were made to listening reflectively. This statement was made by a teacher about an assistant principal "You know, Dick, . . .You're the first guy who's really listened to me…" (p. 287).

The findings of this study are summed up in the following quote:

As was evidenced throughout the data, these administrators tended to be empathetic, sensitive, and responsive to needs as they worked with people and connected in a personal way with individuals, even when called upon to enforce rules, and perform supervision and monitoring functions. In situations where they have the authority to judge, dictate, delegate, and prescribe, these CAPs seemed more inclined to mediate, negotiate, and seek compromises in order to maintain connections and relationships—as they were guided by Noddings's (1984, 1986, 1992) caring perspective (p. 287).

Leadership and Conflict Management

Cascadden (1998) sought to determine how selected principals viewed their work in terms of management and leadership. Three sub areas included examining the principals' perceptions about leadership and management. Second, how did principals incorporate beliefs and policies concerning leadership and management into their work? Last, content analysis was used to analyze how the principals described their work.

The participants were eight elementary school principals. They were located within an hour's drive of Williamsburg, Virginia. Superintendents identified them as superior principals. Three years of experience was another requirement. Participation was voluntary. The eight selected principals were derived from a possible pool of 51 candidates.

The study consisted of a series of three interviews. Themes and issues were generated and compared to themes and issues in current literature concerning leadership and management. Four major themes emerged: (a) role conflict; (b) being there; (c) evolving from managers to leaders; and (d) balancing culture and distributed decision making (p. 137).

Principals reported that they felt torn in their role. They were constantly balancing the demands of central office administrations against the needs of staff and teachers.

Principals made reference to "being there." Their descriptions aligned with building relationships, listening reflectively, developing and maintaining trust, and controlling the emotional pitch.

Principals spoke of evolving from managers to leaders. Evolving from managers to leaders was described as a point one reaches when he or she no longer feels compelled to make every decision, rather empowers staff to make decisions on their own.

Balancing culture and distributive decision making referred to a process in which a principal creates a culture around common values. The author reported most principals referred to this as doing "what's best for children." Principals intimated that they gave staff freedom to make decisions as long as the results of those decisions supported "what's best for children" or whatever value their particular school culture was built around, but were more likely to make unilateral decisions about staff members if the staff member acted in a way that violated the guiding value. This finding reflects developing and maintaining trust.

Analysis of this study was useful in developing the methodology of the present study which is similar in that themes and issues emerging in the interviews were

compared to themes and issues prevalent in the literature. Limitations existed. The researcher solicited superior principals and left that judgment to the superintendents. One superintendent's view of a superior principal could differ dramatically from another superintendent's view. Geographic limitations existed in the study as well. The pool from which the sample was derived was small and the sample is so small one would have to question how transferable the data would be to another study. Cascadeen (1998) did not fully describe how the themes were developed. The reader does not know if multiple researchers developed them or if the principals participated in the review in some way. Cascadeen did not include this information in the narrative.

Many elements of best management in conflict resolution were present in the narrative. The majority of participants made reference to being available for relationship building and communication. References were made to collaborating, and competition. The fact that the principals who were dubbed superior proactively incorporated elements of best practice in conflict management was intriguing.

Principals Preparedness to Manage Special Education

Reviewing Patterson's (2000) study became relevant when the findings in the present study indicated that administrators being knowledgeable about special education conflict would have been helpful in managing the conflict. Patterson described special education's evolution from being a program traditionally managed at the school division level to a program that in most instances is managed at the school-based level. Patterson conveyed that managing special education is a multi-faceted endeavor. Issues that must be addressed include:

(a) The new accountability in the 1997 reauthorization, which requires special

education students to take part in state testing and accountability programs.

(b) Ambiguous and varying definitions of LRE and inclusion.

(c) Conflicts among advocacy groups about the value of inclusive practices

(d) Need for collaboration between regular and special education teachers and

specialists to alter their curriculum pedagogy.

(e) Co-mingling of special education challenges with other challenges, like

minority students' achievement; staff turnover; funding for education;

buildings and facilities; transportation; neighborhood schooling; resentment

about bureaucratic procedures and paperwork; and fear of lawsuits (pp. 9-10).

In reference to the aforementioned issues, Patterson's overarching question was: Are

principals prepared for this? Perhaps Patterson's (2000) study could be best described as

a case study. She reviewed the results of site-based committee actions in a Pleasant

Valley School District in an effort to answer the question.

Pleasant Valley was pre-dominantly white with highly educated vocal parents. "In

1991 Pleasant Valley instituted site committees at each school that included the

principals, teachers, support personnel, parents and, when appropriate students" (p. 10).

These site-based committees were involved in all facets of education at the individual

schools not specifically special education. In 1995, a task force recommended that

Pleasant Valley adopt a more inclusive stance to educating students receiving special

education services. Patterson (2000) reviewed the results of the task force report and

analyzed them in relation to answering the question of whether principals are prepared

for leading changes in special education service delivery?

Patterson (2000) noted in the narrative that implementation of inclusive policies varied from school to school across Pleasant Valley's district. Also, special education information disseminated resulted in disparate interpretation of special education policies.

Also, the report indicated that special education program development varied widely from school to school. Patterson (2000) indicated that the success of special education programs "hinged on the role, support, interest, and expertise of the principal, which varied considerably from school to school" (p. 15). Both teachers and parents asserted that principal support was crucial. At least one principal indicated that he needed to take personal initiative to educate himself about special education policies because information from the school division was lacking. Principals with special education backgrounds admitted that they had an advantage over principals that did not have a special education background.

Both special education and general education teachers noted that they were ill prepared to institute inclusive practices. They also noted that their principals did not have the skills to guide them in this endeavor, and conflict between educators was the result.

Patterson (2000) recommended, based on the analysis of Pleasant Valley's report and existing literature, that key components of pre-service and in-service training should address the following components:

(a) Principals must have a basic understanding of special education services, laws, and regulations, court cases, and funding.

(b) Principals must understand district policies and their implications for the entire school.

(c) Principals must understand district norms regarding support/guidance of policy implementation.

(d) Principals must participate in ongoing education regarding changes and trends in the field of special education, particularly the multiple definitions of inclusion.

(e) Principals must participate in ongoing education regarding leadership philosophy and strategies that facilitate both site-based management and inclusive practices.

(f) If principals are to assume greater responsibility for special education programs in their schools, district administrators responsible for special education must support them by providing more direct communication and dissemination of accurate and current information (p. 18-19).

A major weakness in Patterson's (2000) study was that the narrative was short on specifics about the methodology of the study. References were not included concerning the specific methods incorporated and the reader was left to assume whether case study was the most likely method incorporated. The narrative does not tell the reader the size of the school division; therefore, the reader does not know if the analyzed report was the culmination of information from 100 site-based committees or two site-based committees. Replicating this study with the information represented in the narrative would be difficult.

Managing Special Education Conflict: The Parent's View

Lake and Billingsley (2000) proposed to determine what factors escalate and deescalate parent school conflict with regard to special education. Similarly to the present

study they garnered multiple perspectives—parents, school administrators and mediators. They conducted 44 telephone interviews and used a grounded theory approach to analyze the data. Participants were solicited by the Massachusetts Bureau of Special Education Appeals. There were 438 letters sent out to families involved in an appeal; in turn the families contacted the investigator. From that pool 22 interviews were conducted. School officials were contacted randomly through the Massachusetts Department of Education Directory. There were 370 letters sent and ultimately 16 school officials were interviewed. All eight state mediators were contacted and six agreed to be interviewed. Interview questions included:

(a) What were the critical incidents that led to the request for mediation?

(b) Are there things that you or the school could have done to decrease the conflict?

(c) Were there factors that contributed to the conflict other than the actual issues of disagreement?

(d) Why do you think the conflict was not resolved at the school?

(e) Are there things you wish you had done differently at the first sign of conflict or in the midst of a parent–school conflict?

(f) What actions could be taken to help parents and schools resolve special education conflict (p. 3).

Data from the interviews were analyzed using grounded theory methods developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The initial step was open coding. This involved creating labels for actions and events described in the transcripts. Next the groups of actions and events were collapsed into categories. The eight final categories reflected

responses across the three groups of participants—(a) parents, (b) mediators, and (c) administrators. Eight categories of factors emerged: (a) discrepant views of a child or child's needs, (b) knowledge, (c) service delivery, (d) reciprocal power, (e) constraints, (f) valuation, (g) communication, and (h) trust (p. 244).

Reciprocal power, communication and trust have been prevalent themes across the quality literature related to the topic of special education conflict. Service delivery was a theme that emerged in this present study.

Parents and Special Education Conflict

Budoff and Orenstein (1982) began looking at the results of a formalized conflict management procedure when IDEA was in the infancy stages. The procedures of federal special education law were preceded by Massachusetts's Chapter 766 law. Budoff and Orenstein sought to examine the benefits of the reform that offered an appeal system if parents were not satisfied with their child's education program. Budoff and Orenstein along with research assistants conducted three sets of interviews with a total sample of 71 parents. The first interview was a few weeks after the hearing. The second was 20 months after the hearing, and the third was 42 months after the hearing.

Parental rights to confidentiality made finding participants difficult. The state's board of education mailed request to parents who had rejected a school system's education program for their child and were notified that they could request a hearing. Budoff and Orenstein (1982) compared the volunteering parents to a randomly sampled population and found the two samples to be very similar. They also sought the views of administrators and hearing officers. Administrator attrition was remarkable. The number

of administrators that had left their jobs within the year following a hearing was quite high. This interfered with the study.

The sheer bulk of interviews produced voluminous amounts of information which Budoff and Orenstein (1982) comprised into a book providing descriptions of the participant's responses. Five researchers were involved in the coding. The findings reveal many of the parents referred to concepts related to accommodation, avoidance, building relationships, reflectively listening, developing and maintaining trust, defining the problem, controlling the emotional pitch, equalizing the power base, and utilizing a third party. Each were apparent in the discussion of this study.

Parents and Special Education Conflict and Mediation

Singer and Nace (1985) questioned the utility of mediation in resolving special education disputes. They examined mediation systems in two states, Massachusetts and California. Singer and Nace collected information by interviewing a myriad of individuals involved in the process and by reviewing documents. They incorporated participant observation methods by attending mediation sessions, and they presented a typical case from each state based on a specific child receiving special education services. Referrals came from the state boards of education; although, confidentiality was noted as a barrier in getting participants and reviewing documents. The description of the mediation process is rich and supports the best practices found in other sources, such as, the importance of good relationships between school division personnel and parents. Singer and Nace emphasized the themes prevalent across other literature and the difficulty of defining the problem when the vague standard for a child's special education services is "appropriate." Other consistent themes in the findings included parents

reporting that the mediator equalized the power between them and the school division, and that the mediator listened to their concerns. Mediation involves a third party, incorporating yet another theme present in the literature related to conflict.

Parents and Special Education Conflict: Mediation vs. Due Process Hearing

Vitello (1990) presumed that mediation would resolve specific special education disputes better than due process hearings. His presumption was unfounded. The methods he used to reach his conclusions were comprehensive reviews of due process hearings in 1987. He borrowed and adapted a case-coding instrument used by Goldberg and Kuriloff (1987) to review documents related to the mediations and due process hearings. The instrument had withstood the scrutiny of panel of peers. The participants were derived from a pool of volunteers that had been involved in a hearing or a mediation session during a specific time frame. A total of 104 cases were analyzed. Of these, 53% were resolved through mediation, 18% were settled within the school division while 29% went onto a due process hearing. Issues that led to conflict included: "(a) eligibility and identification, (b) appropriateness of special education services, (c) related services, and (4) placement" (p. 20). The assumption that mediation would resolve more cases in one of the specific aforementioned categories was unfounded.

Vitello (1990) described his findings as "mixed." Parents reported that mediation was less stressful than due process hearing, but reported that they felt the power base was less equal in mediations than due process hearings because agreements made in mediation were not enforceable. In due process hearings, the hearing officer would hold the school division accountable for honoring the agreement.

Managing Special Education Conflict: The Teacher's Point of View

Dyches, Thompson, Murdick, and Gartins (2002) study was reviewed in response to the fact that professional advocacy for students emerged to a small degree in the parent interviews and to a small degree in the teacher workgroups. Also, the literature search did not render any other work related to teachers and school-based special education conflict; therefore, a review was completed to determine if a relation existed between the Dyches (2002) study and the present study.

Dyches et al. (2002) utilized three teacher focus groups from three different states. The purpose of their research was to "determine teacher impressions and opinions about the status and nature of advocacy on behalf of students with mental retardation in schools today" (p. 6). Dyches et al. included a list of goals to be met through the research including information about

(a) The amount of freedom teachers of students with mental retardation have in regard to advocating for their students.

(b) A description of situations in which teachers find themselves where they are torn between advocating for what is in the best interests of their students or supporting a course of action that is preferred by their school administration.

(c) Teacher beliefs concerning what teacher preparation programs should do to prepare new teachers for advocacy roles.

(d) Teacher beliefs concerning what professional organizations and continuing education programs should do to prepare support teachers in advocacy roles.

(pp. 6-7)

Criteria for selection as a participant in the study included:

(a) Being responsible for the instruction of at least one child with mental

retardation;

(b) Employment as a special educator or general educator;

(c) Service in a direct instructional or consultative role;

(d) Teaching students at the primary or secondary level; and

(e) Service on an IEP team for at least one student with mental retardation within

the last year (p. 7).

The pool of the final 24 participants was derived from a larger pool of 47 that indicated on a CEC registration form that they matched the criteria. The focus groups were held in conjunction with the CEC convention.

The settings for each one of the three focus groups was congruent as well as the protocol for conducting the groups. The groups lasted 60-90 minutes, and all were audio-taped. One group was both audio-taped and video-taped.

The transcripts were analyzed to be collapsed into categories that Dyches et al. (2002) referred to as units. Four researchers independently identified the units, then together they formed headers for broad categories of topics. From this process, the following themes emerged:

(a) Teachers are most likely to advocate on behalf of their students regarding

placement decisions and cost of services.

(b) Teachers need training and want support in their advocacy efforts.

(c) Teachers believe that there are some personal and professional risks involved

when advocating for students.

(d) Teachers agree that they have an ethical responsibility to advocate on behalf of their students, but have differing views on what advocacy involves.

(e) Teachers have differing views regarding their students' abilities to self-advocate (p. 9).

From the focus group information, Dyches et al. (2002) concluded that the teachers in the focus groups suggested that special education teachers needed training in the following areas:

(a) special education law,

(b) communication skills,

(c) collaboration and conflict resolution skills, and

(d) information on the role of teacher advocacy with the goal of developing support for their advocacy efforts by school administrators and professional organizations (p. 12).

Dyches et al. (2002) conveyed precisely how the study was conducted. All facets of the design were described in detail. The notable weakness was a lack of description concerning how they arrived at the final four conclusions from the themes that emerged from the focus groups.

<center>Synthesis</center>

The professional commentary literature centered around theories tested by researchers in the general organizational management field. Studies addressing special education conflict emphasized formalized methods of conflict management—due process hearings and mediation. School-based conflict management studies existed, but largely

focused on general school issues, not specifically on issues related to special education. Also, the principal's role in conflict management was a major focus of the literature.

The studies examined were qualitative, and many relied on interviews and surveys as data collection tools. School officials involved were primarily principals. Parents were participants in four studies. Although the parent point of view was described, the descriptions were related to formalized special education conflict management procedures not specifically related to special education conflict management at the school level.

Fris (1992), Marshall et al. (1996), and Cascadden (1998) examined school-based management primarily through the eyes of the principal. The management aspects in Marshall et al. and Cascadden focused on general management tactics in schools not necessarily related to special education.

One can presume that the origin of special education conflict emerges at the school level. Minimal information exists about special education conflict at the school level. The literature was clear in purporting that (a) conflict exists, (b) conflict exists in the special education realm, and (c) principals have the role of managing conflict. However, the literature did not offer multiple perspectives to address the question: How are special education conflicts effectively managed at the school-level?

<center>Multi-vocal Synthesis Models</center>

The research indicated that a need existed to gain the perspectives of various stakeholders knowledgeable about the topic of special education conflict at the school level. Multi-vocal synthesis is a research method that incorporates multiple data sets from various sources such as literature and perspectives of different individuals who are

<center>42</center>

knowledgeable about the studied topic. This method is incorporated when very little

research has been done concerning a particular topic of interest. In the case of this study,

very few researchers had examined special education conflict at the school level;

therefore, a multi-vocal synthesis was considered to be an appropriate way of gathering

varied perspectives. Ogawa and Malen (1991) addressed the possibility to applying the

case study method to the analysis of literature in an effort to promote rigor in the review

of multi-vocal synthesis. Gersten and Baker (2000) used the multi-vocal synthesis

approach to garner recommendations for best instructional practice for English language

learners. The purpose of the following discussion is not to discuss in depth the results of

the Ogawa and Malen's (1991) study; nor the Gersten and Baker (2000) study, but rather

to focus on their approaches to the multi-vocal synthesis method.

Multi-vocal Literature Review

Ogawa and Malen (1991) utilized multi-vocal synthesis as a method for reviewing

literature. Their experience with this issue came from researching literature about school

site-based management. They attempted to examine all accessible writings on the topic.

The writers were a diverse group—academicians, practitioners, journalists, policy

developers, and state officers of education. Their rationale for reviewing a wide range of

literature was the concern that if only juried articles were reviewed the perspective gained

would be the voice of the population engaged in writing a particular type of literature.

They admitted analyzing such a large body of information could be daunting. Their

objective was to create procedures for reviewing the literature. They stressed the

importance of rigor. "Rigor involves adherence to principles and procedures, methods

and techniques that minimize bias and error in the collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of data" (p. 267).

In reference to the application of a research method, they stated that their approach to multi-vocal synthesis had been the case study method. Schwandt (1997) described a "case" or "unit of analysis" as "a specific and bounded (in time and place) instance of a phenomenon selected for study. The phenomenon of interest may be a person, process, event group, organization, and so on" (p. 12). Ogawa and Malen (1991) considered each piece of literature as an individual case, a specific unit of analysis.

Ogawa's and Malen's (1991) summary of the strength of case study research had the following points. Exploratory case studies help induce other questions rather than make deduction. They are usually viewed as starting points for more complex studies. Case study assists the researcher in identifying patterns, developing or adopting constructs that embrace patterns and making tentative hypothesis and relations. Researchers can refine questions that serve as guides for subsequent investigations. Multi-vocal synthesis methods are utilized in situations when empirical studies are lacking. Multi-vocal literature reviews are instructive and suggestive not definitive and conclusive. "They do not warrant firm judgment, let alone precise predictions regarding the phenomenon. They can reveal how people view the phenomenon and how they describe, assess, and interpret the topic of study" (p. 271). The themes and patterns are to formulate potentially productive lines of research. Ogawa and Malen used disparate works as the "voices" in the multi-vocal synthesis and treated each work as an individual case providing a data point.

Multi-vocal Synthesis and Work Groups

Gersten and Baker (2000) used Ogawa and Malen (1991) as a source when conducting their multi-vocal synthesis concerning the professional knowledge base on instructional practices that support cognitive growth for English language learners. Gersten and Baker used two formal data sets: (a) experimental (intervention) studies, and (b) descriptive studies of instructional practices that utilized classroom observation techniques. They eliminated other literature sources because credibility concerns about more subjective work. Their approach differed from Ogawa's and Malen's (1991) in that they used work groups as a third data source. The work groups consisted of teachers, administrators, and researchers in the field of educating English-language learners.

The first two data sets, experimental studies and investigative studies, were meta-analyzed and served to inform the third data set—the work groups. The work groups were asked to discuss the feasibility of incorporating the methods described in the first and second data set, the experimental studies and the investigative studies. Gersten and Baker (2000) built upon Wolcott's (1994) objective of seeking to develop valid interpretation from disparate data sources.

Analyzing the data from the studies. Research team members entered the relevant data into a display matrix. The matrices were continually revised as the team discussed each study's methodology, findings, and interpretations and unresolved issues, and questions were recorded.

Professional work groups. Work groups differ from focus groups in that they are comprised of professionals from a given field. Five work groups across the United States were conducted. The work groups' goals were to identify themes and problems in current

practice, and pose recommendations about best practice. The groups were heterogeneous containing researchers, administrators, teachers, psychologists, and staff development personnel. The research team took notes at the work groups, as well as audio-taping them. The participants were asked to respond to the emergent themes from the literature and give real life examples concerning how the literature's suggested instructional strategies might be incorporated. Emphasis was placed on the idea that these were propositions and may change in the course of the work groups. All work groups except the initial work group were given the opportunity to discuss the results form the subsequent work groups. The suggested practiced rendered from each group varied. For example, the San Diego group primarily involved teachers; therefore, the recommendations were practical in nature. However, the Washington, DC group of researchers offered theoretical recommendations instead.

    Description of literature analysis. Before conducting the work groups, each study was entered into a matrix. The matrix reflected the research team's analysis. Straight forward information concerning subject area, language instruction, grade level and length of treatment, and number of observations were included. Also, the team's judgment of the quality of study were entered as well as the team's sense of major themes, issues and findings. Updating the matrices was an ongoing process following the procedures suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). This involved clustering and reclustering categories and themes as they emerged.

    Gersten and Baker (2001) used these major principles in the multi-vocal data analysis:

(1) Significant input from practitioners for generation and refinement of interpretations (Ogawa & Malen, 1991).

(2) Triangulation across various data sources (Patton, 1990).

(3) Use of propositions generated from immersion in the environment and published research to help guide discussion and analysis.

(4) Use of the constant-comparative method of traversing data sources to develop and refine interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Conscious juxtaposition of disparate studies (Gersten, Morvant, & Brengelman, 1995; Noblit & Hare, 1988).

(5) Serious entertaining of rival hypotheses.

(6) Reciprocal translation (pp. 42, 43).

Relevance to Present Study

Procedure

The present study followed similar procedures to Gersten's and Baker's (2001) work. An initial literature review was incorporated to inform the process, and the utilization of work groups was a component of the present study.

Input from practitioners and propositions generated from published research. Gersten and Baker make reference to propositions from published research and significant input from practitioners for generation and refinement of interpretations. The initial literature search resulted in seven themes or propositions used to inform the following sources of data. Practitioners' input was used to inform each step of the process. The parent interviews generated the themes for the scenarios that the teacher work groups reviewed. Themes developed by the teachers as recommendations for

special education conflict management were organized into an affinity chart then later refined into a survey used as a tool to get parents validation of the work group recommendations. Survey results were the source of the questions presented to the administrators in an effort to get implications related to managing special education conflict at the school level.

Triangulation. Triangulation existed in the present study. Parent interviews were analyzed in an effort to compare data across sources, as well as triangulation across the teacher work groups, and principal interviews.

Serious entertaining of rival hypotheses. Upon completion of the data collection and the development of three major themes, a literature probe was conducted. The purpose was to ascertain if current research validated the present study's themes as well as to determine if rival hypothesis existed.

Reciprocal translation. The notion of reciprocal translation has been discussed earlier in the discourse. Reciprocal translation is the concept that each body of information collected at each step of a study serves to inform the remaining elements of the process.

<center>Strengthening the Case for Multi-Vocal Synthesis</center>

Multi-vocal synthesis is used when very little empirical data are available about a specific area of interest. A comprehensive literature review was conducted revealing little information about the subject of school-based special education conflict between parents of students receiving special education services and school divisions. The literature review suggests a need to examine further the issue of school-based special education conflict management. More information was needed concerning how the varying

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stakeholders in the special education arena perceive the management of special education conflict at the school level. Lake and Billingsley (2000) and Budoff and Orienstein (1982) included both parents and school division personnel in their studies, but their studies did not necessarily focus on school level conflict. Fris (1992), Marshall (1996), and Cascadden (1998) examined conflict from the principal's point of view, but did not focus specifically on special education conflict nor examine teachers' and parents' perspectives of conflict. Singer and Nace (1985) and Vitello (1990) examined mediation, a formalized method of conflict management that often occurs after school division personnel fail to manage a conflict at the school-level. Because the majority of studies either examined special education conflict's formal methods of resolution, due process, and mediation, or studied general school conflict, a multi-vocal synthesis capturing the perspectives of those involved in special education school-based conflict has promised to induce questions for further research in this area.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the framework employed to complete the multi-vocal synthesis addressing the following question: How can special education conflicts between school system personnel and parents of children with disabilities be effectively managed at the school building level? An overview of the type of design will be discussed as well as procedures for selecting the setting and participants. Data were taken from a variety of sources, literature, parent interviews, teacher work groups, parent surveys, and principal interviews. Methods employed to assure confidentiality throughout the study will be addressed in association with data collection procedures and methods of analysis. Issues addressing quality such as credibility, transferability, and dependability will be reviewed.

Overview of the Methods

The literature synthesis indicated that a need existed to gain the perspectives of various stakeholders knowledgeable about the topic of special education conflict at the school level. Multi-vocal synthesis is a research method that incorporates multiple data sets from various sources, such as professional literature and the perspectives of different types of stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the studied topic. This method is incorporated when very little research has been done concerning a particular topic of interest. In the case of the present study, very few researchers had examined special education conflict at the school level; therefore, a multi-vocal synthesis was considered to be an appropriate way of gathering varied perspectives.

Ogawa and Malen (1991) and Gersten and Baker (2000) provide examples of multi-vocal syntheses, and these methods were reviewed to provide background and a

framework for the present study. The following discussion will not provide an in-depth discussion of the results of the Ogawa and Malen study, nor, the Gersten and Baker study. Rather, the focus will be on their approaches to the multi-vocal synthesis method. Ogawa and Malen addressed the possibility of applying the case study method to the analysis of literature in an effort to promote rigor and to ensure relevance in the review. Used in this way, findings from literature reviews become one source of data, complemented by the recommendations made by stakeholders through the methods of multi-vocal synthesis. Gersten and Baker used the multi-vocal synthesis approach to garner recommendations for best instructional practice for English language learners. These researchers point out that caution should be exercised because the purpose of multi-vocal synthesis is not to develop conclusions, but to illustrate the perspectives of those individuals engaged in the phenomena of study (Ogawa & Malen, 1991). This caution is relevant to the present study because the findings from this inquiry could potentially be implemented in the school environment to manage special education conflict. However, it should be remembered that this methodology shares the limitations of other qualitative designs in describing perspectives rather than prescribing hard and fast solutions to such conflicts.

A Model for Multi-vocal Synthesis for the Present Study

Gersten and Baker (2000) applied the multi-vocal synthesis method to a study exploring the topic of supporting cognitive growth for English language learners. Their study incorporated many of the same procedures as the present study. The initial step of their multi-vocal synthesis was a literature synthesis that mirrors the initial step of the present study. A literature synthesis is conducted by reviewing the majority of literature

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written about a topic or topics related to the topic of interest. In the process of reviewing the literature, researchers look for recurring topics or themes. If a theme emerges in the examination of the literature numerous times, then the theme is considered a relevant component in the topic of interest. Gersten and Baker incorporated a team to analyze the studies to be synthesized and to place the key components of the study in a matrix. The method for this present study was similar. Key components of the study were recorded and prevalent components were clustered into seven themes. A detailed account of how the seven themes were derived will be discussed later in this chapter.

Using the Model for Professional Work Groups

Gersten and Baker (2000) conducted five professional work groups in different regions across the United States. They asserted that work groups differ from focus groups because the participants are all professionals in a specific field. Gersten and Baker gained multiple perspectives from these groups because the groups used in their study were heterogeneous. The participants varied—teachers, researchers, administrators, psychologists, and staff development specialists, but they were combined into groups representing segments of the professional community. In the present study, groups were homogeneous. For instance, the five parent participants interviewed represented the parent perspective. The three teacher work groups conducted at another time were composed of teachers, and gave the study the teacher voice. Interviewing the school administrators provided the insight from these specific stakeholders. In the present study, the decision was made to use homogeneous work groups rather than composing groups of parents, teachers, and administrators because of the sensitive nature of conflicts between school personnel and parents of students receiving special education services. In the

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present study, parents and school principals were interviewed and work groups consisting of teachers preparing to be school administrators were conducted.

Assumptions and Rationale for Qualitative Design

Ogawa and Malen (1991) emphasized the need to synthesize information from specific professional sources on topics for which little data has been gathered but on which a robust amount of commentary exists. The initial literature search in the present study relating to special education conflict management yielded a number of studies researching the formal means of managing special education conflict primarily between parents and school divisions at the due process level. Literature on the topic of special education conflict at the school level was minimal. Consequently, the decision was made to synthesize the literature identifying the perspectives of stakeholders.

Gersten and Baker (2000) referred to the appropriateness of using multi-vocal synthesis when the research literature suggests "there are a variety of serious perspectives and little data" (p. 33). This phenomenon was reflected in the initial literature search on conflict management. Studies specifically examining special education conflict at the school level were disparate thereby signaling a need for a "variety of serious perspectives" (p. 33) on this particular topic. Ogawa and Malen (1991) argued that "limited understanding of the issues will be the result" (p. 266) when information does not exist related to a specific topic; in this case, special education conflict management at the school level. Parents, teachers, and school administrators are stakeholders in special education conflicts at the school level and the multi-vocal synthesis model provided the conceptual frame of reference to gain perspectives from these important stakeholders in conflicts.

Figure 1.1 illustrates each point of data collection and the outcomes. For instance, the square figures denote points of data collection, for example the parent interviews. The oval figures denote the outcome. In the case of the initial parent interviews, the outcome was the construction of conflict scenarios.

Procedures

Gersten and Baker (2000) used six guiding principles in the development of their multi-vocal synthesis. These same principles were applied to the present study. Each principle will be discussed in the sections that follow describing the procedures used in to conduct the present study.

(1) Significant input from practitioners for generation and refinement of interpretations (Ogawa & Malen, 1991).

(2) Triangulation across various data sources (Patton, 1990).

(3) Use of propositions generated from immersion in the environment and published research to help guide discussion and analysis.

(4) Use of the constant-comparative method of traversing data sources to develop and refine interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Conscious juxtaposition of disparate studies (Gersten, Morvant, & Brengelman, 1995; Noblit & Hare, 1988).

(5) Serious entertaining of rival hypotheses.

(6) Reciprocal translation [defined as using information derived from one source to inform the subsequent source] (pp. 42, 43).

Gersten and Baker (2000) make reference to using propositions from published research and significant input from practitioners for generation and refinement of

interpretations. This study's initial literature search produced seven themes or propositions used to inform the sources of data that followed. Practitioner's input was used to inform each step of the process illustrated in Figure 1.1. The parent interviews generated the themes for the scenarios. The teacher work groups reviewed the scenarios, and developed recommendations for special education conflict management. The resulting recommendations of the teachers were developed into a survey used as a tool to obtain parents' validation of the work group's recommendations. Twenty two of the teacher work group recommendations were presented to the parents in a survey format for validation. Only 6 of the 22 recommendations were agreed to unanimously by the parents. The resulting six items were converted into questions for school administrators to consider with regard to their impact on school policies and practices.

Selecting the Participants

Creswell (1994) stated "the idea of qualitative research is to purposefully select informants that will best answer the research question" (p. 148). The participants should shed light on the phenomena of interest (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, to participate in a multi-vocal synthesis examining the topic of special education conflict at the school level, a homogeneous sampling procedure was used to identify participants familiar with special education conflict at the school-level. Homogeneous sampling was used in this study. This is a sampling method in which the researcher does not aim for a random sample of participants, but rather focuses on selecting participants knowledgeable about the topic of study. Parents that had been or were involved in a special education conflict were solicited, as well as practicing teachers and administrators. The parents were interviewed individually on separate occasions, as were the school administrators.

Interaction did not occur across groups. The teacher work groups were held on a specific date in a joint setting which allowed interaction within the group/groups of teachers. How the literature was selected is closely related to the process of selecting participants. Ogawa and Malen (1991) and Gersten and Baker (2000) viewed the data collected from the literature synthesis as input from an additional set of stakeholders knowledgeable about the phenomena of interest. As described in detail in Chapter 2, professional literature was selected from juried articles and published books. Search engines such as ERIC and Psychinfo were used to identify bibliographies of relevant literature. Because of the methods incorporated to find relevant literature and the parameters in the selection process, the collection of the literature is deemed to most closely represent the voice of the *academic community*.

Parent Participants

Parents' participation was solicited through ARC, formerly known as the Association for Retarded Citizens, an advocacy agency for individuals with disabilities. Five mothers of children receiving special education services participated. Table 3.1 summarizes their demographics. They resided in the same southeastern state and were from the same region that encompassed the school divisions in which the teachers and administrators were employed. They were in the 25 year-40 year age range. Four mothers were married and presently were not employed outside the home. Two others were single mothers employed outside the home. Even though the fathers of the children in the families impacted by divorce were not residing with their children, both mothers made reference to the fathers' involvement in their children's education, and the fathers' role in

the effort to manage the conflict. All were Caucasian and all the mothers, with one exception had participated in post high school education.

The pool of six children ranged in age from 5-years to 7-years and consisted of two female kindergarteners who had the special education designation of mild mental retardation, one male kindergartener with autism, one male second grader given the special education designation of mental retardation, but perceived as autistic by parents and the family's psychologist, and a set of male twins in second grade diagnosed with autism.

Professional Participants

The professional work groups were assembled from a graduate level class consisting of 17 teachers aspiring to be school administrators. The demographic profile of these participants is shown in Table 3.2. Gender and race were included in the demographic information so considerations could be made in the event the study is replicated. Participants were enrolled in a university program preparing them to become school administrators. The teachers worked in three subgroups during one of their graduate class sessions. The geographic area in which the teachers practiced was similar to the area in which the parent participants resided but not necessarily the same school division in which the children involved in the present study attended.

Table 3.1

Demographics of Selected Mothers Participating in this Study

Participant	Post High School Education	Marital Status	Employment Status	Child's Disability	Grade Level at Time of Conflict
Mother 1 (Robin)	No	Married	Homemaker	Mild Mental Retardation	Kindergarten
Mother 2 (Lisa)	Yes	Divorced	Insurance Consultant	Mild Mental Retardation	Kindergarten
Mother 3 (Regan)	Yes	Divorced	Editor	Autism (Twins)	Second Grade
Mother 4 (Sarah)	Yes	Married	Homemaker	Autism	Kindergarten
Mother 5 (Faye)	Yes	Married	Homemaker	Mild Mental Retardation or Autism.	Second Grade

Table 3.2

Composition of Professional Group

Participant	Female	Male	Caucasian	African-American	General Educator	Special Educator
1	X			X	X	
2	X			X	X	
3	X		X		X	
4	X		X		X	
5	X		X			X
6	X		X			X
7		X	X			X
8	X			X	X	
9		X		X	X	
10	X		X		X	
11	X		X		X	
12	X		X			X
13		X	X			X
14	X		X		X	
15	X		X		X	
16	X		X			X
17		X	X		X	
18		X	X		X	

Six administrators were also interviewed individually and their demographics are presented in Table 3.3. Four administrators were recommended by other professionals in the field, and two were previously known to the researcher. Four of the participants were elementary principals and two were assistant principals. Five were Caucasian women and one was an African-American woman. The administrators served in elementary schools similar to the schools attended by the children of the parent participants, but not necessarily in the same school division. The schools ranged in size from 100 students in attendance to 600 students in attendance. Schools were urban as well as rural.

Table 3.3

Composition of School Administrator Group

Participant	Caucasian	African American	Principal	Assistant Principal
1	X		X	
2	X		X	
3		X		X
4	X			X
5	X		X	
6	X		X	

Data Collection Procedures

The present study followed similar procedures to those used by Gersten and Baker (2000) and relied on their suggested principles. Each data set was analyzed for a specific purpose. For example, Gersten and Baker used their literature synthesis to develop four propositions related to teaching English language learners to guide their conversations with work group participants. In the present study, the work groups were guided by scenarios developed from the parent interviews and influenced by findings in the literature. The technique of developing scenarios used in the present study relates to Gersten's and Baker's major principles of gaining "significant input from practitioners for generation and refinement of interpretations" and "reciprocal translation" (pp. 43-44). Reciprocal translation is the notion that each body of information collected at each step of the study serves to inform the remaining elements of the study. In the school-based special education conflict study, the data set collected from the parents was used to create conflict scenarios to act as a construct for the teacher work groups to develop related recommendations.

As shown in Figure 1.1, the first source of data was a literature search following the procedures utilized by Gersten and Baker (2000) in their multi-vocal synthesis. The second data set came from the parent interviews. The data from the parent interview transcripts were organized into themes that were constructed into two conflict scenarios. This set the stage for data collection from the three teacher work groups who each responded to the scenarios. Information from the work groups was collected, analyzed, and displayed in an affinity diagram generated in the preceding stage. The categories derived from the affinity diagram were used in a survey for the original five parent

interviewees to validate. The fourth data set came from administrator interviews. As illustrated by the study's theoretical framework in Figure 1.1, the data sets were distilled from a large body of information into the three themes which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Means of Collecting Data: Instrument Selection/Construction

Propositions Generated From Published Research

Parameters were put around the literature that would be reviewed. Because researchers and scholars were not included in the interviews and work groups, a logical way to gain their perspective was acquired through the method of literature synthesis. Articles retrieved from juried journals and published books were the two literature sources utilized. Themes were developed by determining their prevalence in the research and commentary. If a theme emerged three times, then the theme was considered important and coded by placement in a category. As the information was distilled and more and more related themes emerged, they were further aggregated into broader categories until the seven themes were created: (a) building relationships, (b) listening reflectively, (c) developing and maintaining trust, (d) defining the problem, (e) controlling the emotional pitch, (f) equalizing the power base, and (g) utilizing third parties.

Parent Interviews

According to Morse, "the researcher should keep the first interviews with participants broad letting the participants tell their stories" (p. 229). Initial data collection consisted of five interviews with parents of children with disabilities. The interviews ranged from approximately 45 minutes in length to 2 hours. The goal was to get a rich

description of possible conflicts the family had experienced with school division personnel to glean themes to develop into scenarios. The parents responded to the following inquiry: Describe a special education conflict you have had with professionals at your child's school?

The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. In four out of five cases, the parents requested that the interview be conducted in their homes. In one instance, I met with the participant in a public library. The interviews were audio-taped then transcribed. Fifteen themes were derived from the interviews as shown in Table 3.4.

Construction of Scenarios

The purpose of the scenarios developed from the themes, was to provide constructs for the teacher work groups to use in their development of recommendations. This procedure follows Gersten and Baker's (2000) major principle of reciprocal translation with one step of the process informing the next step. These scenarios included significant input from the academic community through the literature synthesis and from the parents through their interviews. The themes from the parent interviews generated a set of interpretations that were refined in the scenarios for further interpretation by the teacher groups. Other principles prescribed by Gersten and Baker are relevant; for instance triangulation across data sources (Patton, 1990). Triangulation existed in the process of analyzing the parent interviews that created the themes using "constant-comparative methods of traversing data sources to develop and refine interpretations" (p. 42). In this particular instance the data sources were traversed and compared with the parent interviews as well as the literature. The scenarios resulting from these blended data are provided in Appendix C.

Table 3.4

Themes Developed From Interviews with Parents

Themes	Parent 1 Robin	Parent 2 Lisa	Parent 3 Sarah	Parent 4 Regan	Parent 5 Faye
1. Happy w/ preschool	x	x	x		
2. Parents questioned schools disability designation		x	x	x	X
3. School personnel changed		x	x	x	
4. Parents questioned school's tests		x	x	x	X
5. Negative statements made about the child	x	x	x	x	X
6. Parent not taken seriously	x	x		x	X
7. Not informed about options			x	x	X
8. Parents utilized a third party	x	x	x	x	X
9. Parents observed child at school	x	x	x	x	X
10. Disagreements about participation in general education	x	x	x	x	X
11. No communication	x		x	x	
12. Low expectations for the child		x	x		X
13. No data			x	x	X
14. No IEP agreement		x	x	x	X
15. Conflict was emotionally draining	x	x	x	x	X

In the course of the literature review, a model developed by Mauer (1991) was discovered illustrating stages of conflict. Mauer's stages of conflict were used to provide the structure for developing the conflict scenarios used in this study. Once again, Gersten's and Baker's (2000) principles were incorporated. Information from the literature review was used to interpret and guide discussion in the interviews and in subsequent analysis.

Mauer's Phases of Conflict

Mauer (1991) discussed how conflict in general erupts in schools. He described three stages and phases of conflict and characterized them using the metaphor of a fire: (a) smoke, (b) fire, and (c) ashes.

(a) The Smoke. Mauer's (1991) phase 1, *the smoke*, is similar to Katz' and Lawyer's (1993) stage 1 of awareness. One party lets the other party know a conflict exists. Mauer emphasized the importance of being proactive. One should address the conflict before it gets out of hand. Mauer asserted that Peters and Waterman's managing by "walking around" would help school personnel to find areas of potential conflict and to address the issues in a timely fashion.

(b) The Fire. Mauer's (1991) phase two, *the fire*, is the stage of confrontation. As Katz and Lawyer (1993) suggested, the important posture in this phase is to maintain a resourceful state, keeping emotions under control and gathering information about the conflict.

(c) The Ashes. Mauer's (1991) last stage is called *the ashes*. At this stage a determination is required concerning the changes that must occur in response to the conflict.

Teacher Work Groups

The involvement of the work groups in this study enabled changes to be identified and recommendations to be developed to manage special education conflict at the school level. Gersten and Baker (2000) stated "work group participants could identify what they saw as themes and problems in current practice, or problems with recommendations about best practice" (p. 37). The teacher work groups in the present study were guided by two conflict scenarios developed from the themes presented in Table 3.4 that emerged from the parent interviews. The scenarios were intended to act as a stimulus for discussion. One scenario featured a child named Molly Riley. The other scenario featured a child named Tommy Adams. These scenarios are provided in Appendix C. First the groups read about Tommy Adams. They silently spent 10 to 20 minutes reading the scenario while writing recommendations responding to the scenarios on index cards. After the participants in each group had completed reading and making individual recommendations related to the scenario, the entire group worked silently dividing the cards into categories. The categories were given headers. The same process was followed for the Molly Riley scenario. The outcome from this data set was a set of 22 recommendations utilized for the development of a parent validation survey.

Parent Validation Procedures

At this stage Gersten's and Baker's (2000) major principles continued to be used as a guide as to how best to proceed with the present study. The work groups provided rich input from practitioners in the teaching profession. Their development of the categories and sub-categories met the major objective of generating and refining interpretations of data provided earlier by parents. By virtue of conducting three work

groups, triangulation was present at the teacher work group stage and in the following

stage when the responses of the parents were considered. The technique of reciprocal

translation was utilized throughout this multi-vocal synthesis. Following the teacher work

groups, a diagram (Figure 3.1) was designed through the synthesis of the categories

organized by the teachers. A telephone survey was developed from these categories to be

used in soliciting parental confirmation of the teacher's recommendations for managing

conflict.

Administrator Interview Procedures

Administrators participated in sessions designed for them to comment on the

recommendations that emerged from the study. This occurred at their respective schools

and they responded to the "grand tour" question— How can special education conflicts

between school system personnel and parents of children with disabilities be managed

effectively at the building level? This question was followed by six sub-questions

developed from the recommendations unanimously selected by the parents. For example,

the parents agreed that evidence that IEPs were being followed in the classroom would

have been effective in managing the conflict. Their response from the survey was

developed into the question: "What practices would be implemented in the school to

make it evident that IEPs were being followed in the classroom?" Gersten's and Baker's

(2000) major principles were followed even as the last group of practitioners were asked

to provide their perspective. The parent survey questions used to shape the development

of the interview protocols is another example of reciprocal translation and continued

generation and refinement of interpretations. The sessions with school principals ranged

Figure 3.1. Teachers' recommendations to manage special education conflict.

in time from 20 minutes to 60 minutes. The final outcome of this data collection resulted in implications for policies and practices related to managing special education conflict at the school-level. Those implications are as follows: (a) communicating with parents, (b) training staff to differentiate instruction, (c) training administrators in special education compliance, (d) observing in classrooms, and (e) earning trust.

Data Analysis Procedures

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1.1 orchestrated the collection in six sequentially dependent steps: (a) the literature synthesis, (b) parent interviews, (c) teacher work groups, (d) parent validation survey, and (e) administrators' interviews. The data sets collected from the reviews of the literature, interviews with parents and administrators were analyzed by the researcher. The teacher work groups were involved in the interpretation of the data they generated through collapsing ideas into themes or categories.

Analysis of the data from the literature, parent interviews, the three teacher work groups, and the administrators interviews was completed following the steps outlined by Tesch as cited in Creswell (1994) (p. 155).

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read through all of the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind.

2. Pick one document (one interview)—the most interesting, the shortest, the one on the top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, "What is this about?" Do not think about the "substance" of the information, but rather its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.

3. When you have completed this task for several informants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together simple topics. Form these topics into columns that might be arrayed as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers.

4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try out this preliminary organizing scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.

5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.

6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.

7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.

8. If necessary, recode your existing data (p. 155).

Gersten and Baker (1994) used a similar clustering technique to identify major patterns that emerged from the work groups, and literature in their study.

In the present study a topic was determined important if it emerged at least three times. Those sub-topics were collapsed into broader topics until a manageable set of categories were developed. Gersten's and Baker's (2000) major principle of traversing data across sources was incorporated and the categories were clustered together across

the groups. This procedure resulted in the identification of the three major conclusions which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

<div align="center">Addressing Quality</div>

Ely, Anzul, Friedman and Garner (1991) delineated issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and trustworthiness, which were carefully considered in this study of special education conflict management at the school building level.

Credibility

Guba and Lincoln as cited in Ely et al. (1991) considered a study credible if the researcher had: (a) prolonged engagement in the field, (b) done persistent observation, (c) triangulated the data, (d) determined referential adequacy, (e) experienced peer debriefing, and (f) checked back with the people who were studied .In this case, data were collected over a period of 12 months, data sources were iterative and interactive, and participants were involved in member checking to assure that their perspectives were portrayed with accuracy.

Triangulation was an element present intentionally in this study. Scwandt (1997) defined triangulation as involving "the use of multiple data sources, multiple investigators, multiple theoretical perspectives and multiple methods" (p. 163). The interviews and the work groups provided the sources necessary for comparing the multiple data sets. Examples of the presence of triangulation are: (a) triangulation across the literature sources, (b) triangulation across the responses to the parents' interviews, (c) triangulation across the three teacher work groups, and (d) triangulation across the administrator interviews.

The seven themes derived from the initial literature review served as a *referential analysis* as the ongoing perspectives and further interpretations emerged. The interview and work group responses mirrored elements present in the literature discussed in Chapter 4. During the course of the study sensitivity was given to the negative cases, and determined if they were exceptional or presented a pattern.

Peer debriefing was ongoing throughout the study. The iterative data collection and analysis process generated multiple conversations with participants and with knowledgeable peers. The compilation of recommendations for school-based conflict management from the work group participants resulted in meeting the criteria of checking back with the people studied earlier to ensure credibility.

Transferability

Morgan (1998) described transferability in this fashion--"the degree to which these results are expected to occur in other places" (p. 70). The limited number of participants involved cannot insure generalizability, but does insure a firm basis for further study. In this regard, consistency in procedures was paramount and every effort was made to document procedures so the study could be replicated and expanded.

Trustworthiness

Morgan (1998) made these suggestions in regard to overall "trustworthiness." "Trustworthiness is the quality of an investigation, and its findings make it noteworthy to audiences" (Schwandt, p. 164). Data were collected systematically. The pilot test must be emphasized to insure that the work group questions were designed in such a way as to optimize the retrieval of the sought-after information. One could argue that the similar perspectives communicated from school division personnel and parents across all levels

supports the overall "trustworthiness" and is not a result of chance. For example, since all three work groups had similar perspectives, logic suggests that had a particular work group been held prior to the other two work groups, the results would have been the same. Morgan (1998) touts the strength of work groups in that results can be clarified from multiple sources. In this study, patterns did exist across all six data sets.

Dependability

Dependability addresses the likelihood that if the same procedures were employed in a different study, the study's results would be similar to the finding in this multi-vocal synthesis examining recommendations for school-based special education conflict management. The development of the theoretical framework, using Gersten and Baker (2000) as a model and closely following the major principles described in the framework provided assurance that results of another study conducted in the same manner in similar population samples would render similar results. However, dependability in this case cannot be guaranteed because of the small size of the participant samples, and the specific location in which the study was conducted.

<div align="center">The Qualitative Narrative</div>

Merriam (1998) stated that the most common way findings are presented in a qualitative report is an organization according to themes or categories. She asserted that the narrative begins with a brief overview of the findings. These findings are supported by quotes and documentation from the study. However, the unique design of the theoretical framework incorporated in the special education conflict management at the school-level multi-vocal synthesis will be used in this case as an organizing mechanism to present the findings. The major findings will be presented and results will be filtered

through each data set: literature synthesis, parent interviews, teacher work groups, parents response to the survey, and administrators response to the findings to illustrate how their collection, analysis and synthesis resulted in three themes which will be discussed in conclusion in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the overall findings of the study beginning with an overview of the multi-vocal synthesis as encompassed in the conceptual framework and the research questions. The conceptual framework illustrated how the data were collected from the groups that held a stake in managing special education conflict. The outcomes of each data set, including (a) parent interviews, (b) teacher work groups, (c) parent survey, and (d) administrator interviews, will be analyzed in relationship to the data derived from the literature reviews.

Overview of the Multi-Vocal Synthesis

The purpose of this inquiry was to develop recommended conflict management strategies for schools to incorporate into their policies and practices when working with parents of children with disabilities. In order to address the research question it was necessary to derive descriptions of special education conflicts at the school building level as well as recommendations for their management. To do so, a multi-vocal synthesis methodology was employed.

The intended outcome of any multi-vocal synthesis is to gain perspectives from a variety of stakeholders surrounding a specific topic. The findings in this study were derived from a parent interview data set, teacher work group data set, parent survey data set, and administrator interview data set. Literature provided an additional data set. Each of these data sets produced a specific outcome. Data from the parent interviews were analyzed and organized into themes. These themes were incorporated into scenarios

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which were presented to the teacher work groups. The teachers reviewed the scenarios and provided recommendations for managing school-based special education conflicts. Parents reviewed these 22 recommendations and unanimously identified six recommendations considered most useful for managing special education conflict at the school level. Elementary principals then discussed the implications of these six recommendations with regard to the policies and practices used in their schools. These six recommendations comprise the central findings for the present study.

Overview of the Findings

The findings from this multi-vocal synthesis suggest that special education conflict can be managed effectively when policies and practices used in schools provide evidence to parents that (a) IEPs are being followed in the classroom; (b) school personnel are knowledgeable about providing services in an inclusive environment; (c) administrators are knowledgeable about special education compliance issues; (d) school personnel are held accountable for providing special education students with an appropriate education; (e) school personnel demonstrate trustworthy behavior; and (f) accommodations are provided in the classroom. Synthesizing the responses across all data sources resulted in the identification of three major themes regarding the management of special education conflict at the building level. These themes addressed the importance of the following strategies for school personnel: (a) providing specialized services, (b) engaging in productive partnerships with parents, and (c) demonstrating accountability. These themes and their implications for practice will be discussed in conclusion in Chapter 5.

Parent Interviews:

Illustrating Special Education Conflicts

As described in Chapter 3, five parents of young children with disabilities who had experienced special education conflict with school personnel were interviewed, and from their interviews 15 themes were identified and developed into scenarios to illustrate special education conflicts at the school building level (see Table 4.1). In this section these themes are discussed in relationship to the professional literature on conflict, which represents the "voice" of the academic community within this multi-vocal synthesis. To reiterate, the seven themes derived from the literature included: (a) building relationships, (b) listening reflectively, (c) developing and maintaining trust, (d) defining the conflict, (e) controlling the emotional pitch, (f) equalizing the power base, and (g) utilizing third parties.

Building Relationships

Building relationships, trust, and communication are inter-locking concepts. Examples given by the parents in describing their special education conflicts with school personnel could traverse all three themes. Three parents shared that they had good relationships with specific staff members. The conflict emerged when those staff members departed. One parent's experience was that a principal became gravely ill and had to leave her position. The parent described the principal as open and willing to try anything to see if a strategy would benefit her child with Down Syndrome. The principal that followed was not as open, and the bad feelings between the two parties escalated to the point that the mother was jailed for trespassing when the educational issues seemed to

Table 4.1

Themes Developed From Parents

Themes	Parent 1 Robin	Parent 2 Lisa	Parent 3 Sarah	Parent 4 Regan	Parent 5 Faye
1. Parents were happy with preschool.	x	x	x		
2. Parents questioned school's disability designation.		x	x	x	X
3. School personnel changed.		x	x	x	
4. Parents questioned school's tests.		x	x	x	X
5. Negative statements made about the child.	x	x	x	x	X
6. Parent not taken seriously.	x	x		x	X
7. Parents not informed about options.			x	x	X
8. Parents utilized a third party.	x	x	x	x	X
9. Parents observed child at school.	x	x	x	x	X
10. Disagreements about participation in general education.	x	x	x	x	X
11. School staff did not communicate.	x		x	x	
12. School staff had low expectations for the child.		x	x		X
13. School staff did not document progress.			x	x	X
14. Parents and school staff disagreed about IEP.		x	x	x	X
15. Conflict emotionally draining.	x	x	x	x	X

be relatively benign. The parent wanted more support for her child in the general education environment and she questioned the school system's assessment of her child's ability. She thought her child was more capable than the formal assessment indicated. However, the relationship between her and the principal became so acrimonious that the basis for engagement was eventually lost.

Two parents reported that conflict emerged when their child changed teachers. One felt that her child had been moved from a school with a very competent teacher to a school where his teacher was not only incompetent, but lacked basic honesty. The second parent reporting conflict escalation following a personnel change shared that her sons' teacher could not form relationships with the general education teachers to insure that her sons were included in the general education environment.

All parents reported that they had been happy with their child's special education preschool experience. A national study conducted by the Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution in Education (CADRE, 2004) reflected similar findings, as well. Parents' complaints sharply rose after special education students exited preschool and entered the early elementary grades. The parents in this study focused on the quality of the pre-school educational programming, suggesting that the model used by most special education preschools, which promotes parent- teacher- child relations, played a role in the their satisfaction. Clearly, building relationships is also viewed by the academic community as an important aspect as reported by Budoff (1982), Lake (2000), and Marshall et al. (1996).

The works of Budoff (1982) and Marshall et al. (1996) advised that school system personnel devote time and effort to building relationships. Katz and Lawyer (1993) made

reference to the delicate balance of managing a situation while preserving the relationship. Thomas (1976) described accommodation as an integration of both parties' needs. Unfortunately, due to the limitations of this study, only the parents could describe their needs, and the motives of school personnel for not meeting the parent's perceived needs will remain unknown.

Budoff and Orenstein (1982) determined that a lack of care towards parents was a contributing factor in explaining why parents of special education students chose to go to due process hearings. The following quote illustrates this factor: "The school staff said they never had time to meet with me" (p. 52) and "school personnel were hostile and made us feel like the enemy" (p. 57). Budoff and Orenstein indicated that poor prior relationships factored into decisions to go to due process and stressed the importance of mechanisms to protect school-parent relations.

Listening Reflectively/Communication

Four out of five parents reported that they were not taken seriously when they presented their concerns. Many were told to give the situation "more time." Three out of five parents initiated communication through notes or phone calls that were not answered in a timely fashion or in some instances not answered at all.

Although the conflicts described by the parents in this study are not accompanied with descriptions of the events by the school personnel, the reluctance to respond to communication may have been an avoidance tactic (Thomas, 1976). Budoff (1982) and Margolis (1987) emphasized the importance of good listening skills in the relationships between parents and school division personnel.

Developing and Maintaining Trust

Parents' responses to the conflict seem to suggest that trust had eroded. For example, four out of five parents questioned the school system's special education designation assigned to their child. Three out of five reported that they were not informed of instructional placement options for their child. In one instance, parents who felt that their child was autistic asserted that school personnel did not inform them that a specialized program for children with autism was available in the county. In another instance, parents felt that school personnel had not explained why their child had to go to a school farther away from home when the parent perceived that the neighborhood school had a more suitable program.

Four out of five parents requested independent evaluators. Two out of five were straight forward in their assertion that they would choose their own private evaluators because they did not trust the evaluations conducted by school system personnel. Three out of five parents requested data from school personnel to show that their child's IEP was being implemented in the classroom. These actions seems to reflect their lack of trust towards the school system.

Budoff and Oreinstein (1982) stated that once a school division loses a parent's trust, negotiation is almost impossible, and that trust is almost impossible to regain. Margolis (1987) suggested that accepting parents as they are and focusing on their specific goals for their child provides the stepping stones for building trust or for restoring trust.

Controlling the Emotional Pitch

All the parents made reference to the emotional distress brought on by the conflict. In fact, three out of five mothers cried as they relayed their stories. Four out of five expressed that they would not want another family with a child with a disability to experience the emotional pain that they had endured.

Budoff and Orenstein (1982) reported that many families reported that the emotional pain had not subsided greatly over the course of years. Fris (1992) stressed that conflict evokes strong emotions and school personnel must learn to "control the emotional pitch" (p.71). Mauer (1991) suggested that in managing conflicts, the emotional components of the conflict should be discussed before the substantive issues.

Defining the Conflict

Determining whether or not a misunderstanding or inability to frame the conflict contributed to the conflict's escalation was difficult to ascertain because the parent's perspective was the only perspective available. In fact, at the time of the interviews the conflicts had become multi-faceted and in some cases the presenting problem was hard to define. In two cases the children's' behavior was perceived by the parent as an indicator that their child was not happy in the school environment. This prompted investigation and following the investigation a host of other issues came to light. Another parent became concerned when her autistic children were cast in a school play in non-verbal roles, which she perceived as being stereotypically autistic. She also believed that when her children found being in the play to be stressful, their needs were not accommodated in any way. Again, further conversation with the parent brought up a litany of issues.

Defining the problem that started a conflict was challenging because in the majority of instances one issue was not identified as the trigger. From a research perspective, it cannot be conveyed whether the conflict started with one issue then proceeded to multiple issues or if there were multiple issues from the conception of the conflict.

Equalizing the Power Base and Utilizing Third Parties

These themes were combined because parents in an effort to equalize the power base utilized third parties. All parents were identified as participants through their participation in an advocacy organization. All had secured a third party. All had support from the advocacy organization, others had individual parent advocates and one had hired a lawyer.

Fifteen Themes Developed into Scenarios

Connections existed between the initial literature search and the 15 themes derived from the parent interviews. The 15 themes were used to develop two scenarios describing a conflict between the school division and parents of a child with a disability. One scenario described a conflict between the school division and the parents of a hypothetical child named "Tommy Adams." Tommy was introduced earlier in this discourse, but in terms of review Tommy had autism and his parents wanted that designation for him and they wanted him to be placed in a specialized autism program. The other scenario involved "Molly Riley." Molly's parents wanted her to be included more in general education classrooms and for her to have programming that would stretch her capacity. Both of these scenarios can be found in Appendices C and D.

Teacher Work Groups:

Recommending Ways to Manage Special Education Conflicts

Three teacher work groups developed recommendations in response to the two

scenarios containing elements present in the parents' descriptions of conflicts that they

had with school personnel. Silently, each individual teacher wrote recommendations on

an index card. The groups remained silent as they clustered individual responses into

categories. Later, the responses were analyzed and categorized into recommendations and

further sub-divided and collapsed into six main categories: (a) improving the IEP process;

(b) providing staff development; (c) conducting appropriate evaluations and ongoing

assessments; (d) improving parent involvement; (e) providing appropriate service; and (f)

determining appropriate placement. These recommendations are compared with the

results from a literature review conducted prior to the study and a subsequent review

prompted by the findings as illustrated in Table 4.2.

Improving the IEP Process

Sub-categories that emerged under this header included: (a) modifying the

existing IEP; (b) following and complying with IEP procedure; (c) implementing IEP; (d)

reviewing placement; (e) conducting staff education; and (f) conducting evaluations. In

the initial literature review similar topics emerged in at least two instances. Lake and

Billingsley (2000) wrote about disagreements about service delivery being an issue that

caused conflicts to escalate, and Beekman (1998) wrote a commentary that stressed the

importance of good relations with families starting at the IEP process. At the end of the

data analysis, a literature review was conducted to compare the analysis with current

literature. Carta (2002) made reference to improving the IEP process by having a good

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Table 4.2

Categories of Teacher Work Group Responses

Category	Related to the Initial Literature	Related to the Final Literature
1. Improving the IEP process	X	X
2. Providing Staff Development		X
3. Conducting Appropriate Evaluations and Ongoing Assessments		X
4. Improving Parent Involvement	X	X
5. Providing Appropriate Services	X	
6. Determining Appropriate Placement	X	

sense of what the team wants for the child prior to the IEP. Kabot (2003) made these recommendations: (a) Make sure the IEP fits the child and (b) Outline the instructional program you will develop to implement the IEP. CADRE (2004) also indicated that IEP development was an area that prompted parents to initiate a complaint against the school division.

Providing Staff Development

The professional community of educators placed a great amount of emphasis on staff development. The category providing staff development was the header for 11 sub-categories: (a) providing general staff development; (b) differentiated instruction training; (c) insuring staff accountability; (d) teacher training in special education; (e) administrator training in special education compliance; (f) administrator training in special education instruction; (g) peer assisting from staff to staff; (h) providing special ed. instruction staff development; (i) observing classroom; (j) inclusion training; and (k) general administrator training.

Although, the theme of providing staff development was one of the prevailing themes among teachers and administrators alike, the theme was not strong in this study's initial literature review. In the subsequent literature review Kabot (2003) stressed the need for a professional development portfolio. Dufour (2000) promoted professional learning communities so staff could learn from one another and Smith (2001) considered how administrators could thread staff development through the day-to-day activities of the school. With regard to providing staff development related to special education practices, Soodak (2002) considered the importance of staff development to train teams to work in inclusive environments. Mock and Kauffman (2002), in contrast, questioned if

all teachers in spite of their disciplines could be trained to work with students with special needs.

Conducting Appropriate Evaluations and Ongoing Assessments

The teacher work groups organized recommendations addressing evaluations and assessments into the following categories: (a) completing adequate testing; (b) reporting periodic progress; (c) conducting private evaluations; (d) specializing testing to be appropriate for the child; (e) considering changes in placement; and (f) considering all disabling conditions in conducting appropriate evaluations and ongoing assessments.

Conducting appropriate evaluations and ongoing assessments was not a prevalent theme in the initial literature review. In the final literature review, Kabot (2003) stressed the importance of a good data collection system. Tomlinson and Callahan (1999) reviewed assessment in its relationship to differentiated instruction. In other words, teachers assess to determine how they should design instruction for specific students. Carta (2002) decried the lack of good assessment instruments for the students in the early childhood age group. Recent literature, including the CADRE (2004) study, identified issues of evaluation and assessment as an area that prompted parents of children with disabilities to proceed with formal complaint procedures.

Improving Parent Involvement

The teacher work groups organized recommendations addressing improving parent involvement into the following categories: (a) communicating in general; (b) communicating with administrators; (c) responding in a timely fashion; (d) participating in parent advocacy training; (e) earning trust; (f) fostering meaningful parent participation; (g) taking teacher/ parent partner training; (h) parent participating in due

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process; and (i) engaging in professionalism. This category had the strongest links with the seven themes derived from the original literature search. One can see building relationships, listening reflectively, and developing and maintaining trust embedded in the categories.

Providing Appropriate Services

The teacher work groups organized recommendations that addressed providing appropriate services into the following categories: (a) providing placement supports; (b) accommodating special needs; (c) accessing general education; (d) sanctioning teachers; (e) differentiating instruction; and (f) examining past successful interventions. Vitello (1990) acknowledged that appropriateness of special education services was an issue that served as an impetus for families to seek mediation. Lake and Billingsley (2000) identified disagreements about service delivery as a factor that escalated conflict. Other authors emphasized the role that disagreements about service delivery played in special education conflict. Kabot (2003) emphasized clarity in outlining the instructional program as a strategy to avoid due process. Disagreements over service delivery emerged as a major topic in the literature, particularly concerning the delivery of inclusive services and the coordination difficulties that can occur among parents, administrators, special education teachers and general education teachers (Kieff, Oremland, & Flynn, Sadler, 2003; Salend, 2002). Mock and Kauffman (2002) questioned if general educators had the specialized training to deliver inclusive services to special education students.

Determining Appropriate Placement

In the initial analysis, it seemed appropriate to collapse this category into providing appropriate services; however, further examination revealed that the comments

related specifically to determining where instruction would occur rather than determining what the nature of the instruction would be. Teachers organized recommendations that addressed determining appropriate placement into the following categories: (a) following placement procedures; (b) considering placement options; (c) informing parents of options; and (d) accommodating students' needs. Lake and Billingsley (2000) refer to conflicts posed by issues of service delivery and instructional placement. Vitello (1990) noted that a student's instructional placement was ranked among the top four reasons parents go to due process. The CADRE (2004) study also reflected that placement disagreements are often present when parents file formal complaints.

Parents Survey:

Validating the Recommendations to Manage Special Education Conflict

The teacher work group recommendations were developed into a diagram illustrating how the recommendations were distributed across 22 categories representing strategies that might have helped to manage the conflict they experienced.. These categorical statements were organized into a questionnaire. The parents were asked to respond to the efficacy of recommendations in terms of managing special education conflict with (a) strongly agree, (b) agree, (c) disagree, and (d) strongly disagree.

Four out of five parents responded to the survey and strongly agreed unanimously on six recommendations that would have been helpful in managing the conflict: (a) evidence that IEPs were being followed in the classroom; (b) evidence that staff had knowledge of how to provide services in an inclusive environment; (c) evidence that administrators were knowledgeable about special education compliance issues; (d) evidence that staff would be held accountable for providing an education; (e) staff

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demonstrating trustworthy behavior; and (f) evidence that accommodations were provided in the classroom.

Evidence that IEPs Were Followed in the Classroom

Parallels existed between providing evidence that IEPs were followed and accommodations were provide to students with disabilities. Many of the complaints surrounding the IEP in the day to day workings of the classroom dealt with accommodations specified in the IEP not being exercised in the classroom setting. For example, parents noted the absence of a visual schedule, and the absence of specified breaks during instruction despite statements in their child's IEP to provide them. Another concern was that services designated in the IEP were never delivered, such as an observation from a behavior specialist; or if they were delivered, they were not delivered with the frequency set forth in the IEP. This was the case with students' related services schedules within the IEPs, as well as the delivery of instruction and behavioral supports.

One parent described the lack of the implementation of the IEP in this way: The IEP specified that a behavioral specialist would observe her child. This is the parent's description of the lack of implementation of the IEP.

> Actually, there was supposed to be the behavior specialist… [He] was supposed to come in to observe the class and see how Karen did and everything. That never happened, never happened at all last year. He was supposed to come in. He never did. And that was written in her IEP that he was to come in to observe the class and get back to me. That was never… And I never made it a big issue I just--. I get kind of tired of dealing with it. It was just a lot of stress last year. I couldn't deal with it any more**.** (Robin)

Parents reported that related services were not delivered according to the IEP. Here is one example.

> He (the principal) checked into it and said, "Central office told me that he's missed two days of O.T. and I haven't had a chance to talk with her yet about making it up." And, yes, the speech therapist, and I told him I knew the speech therapist had already missed three days of this school year because she had told me. She said one day that she had some kind of training that she had to do for the next two days, and we talked with her, and she will make it up. She'll-she'll make it up whenever she can. So those are the answers I get to everything, everything. We'll look into it and he never gets back with me. (Sarah)

Reference is made to the recommendation evidence that IEPs were being followed in the classroom to some degree in the literature. For example the recommendation is linked to the Lake and Billingsley (2000) study in which findings indicated that disagreements about service delivery could cause conflicts to escalate. Kabot (2003) suggested outlining the instructional program needed to implement the IEP.

Evidence that Administrators were Knowledgeable about Special Education

Administrators that were flexible and open to new solutions to problems were viewed in a positive light in the parent interviews. Changes in staff whether it be teachers or principals would result in both positive and negative outcomes. In some instances, parents were concerned that the principal would not correct teachers, and would "back them" no matter what the issue. Akin, to the above mentioned issue was the avoidance of conflict practiced by many of the principals. Lastly, principals demonstrating that they

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were not aware of what went on in the classroom made resolving the conflict more difficult. Satisfaction with a principal's openness was communicated in this way:

At that time, there was a principal at that school who was, was very willing to try, was very open to new suggestions and new ideas. . .and that changed in January. She got sick, didn't come back. They got a new principal who did not believe that students with cognitive delays should be in the regular, regular classroom…but that's when the major problems began. (Lisa)

Another parent described this scenario:

And, um, it wasn't too long after that, I had set up an appointment to talk with the kindergarten teacher, the special ed. teacher, and the principal. And I, you know, I had talked to the principal. I came in one day and I talked to the principal. "I think we need to sit down and have a talk, because something is not going right in here." And she was like, "Okay, well go ahead and make the appointment, and, you know, I'll see you then." She got the….Well, the appointment was two weeks after I had talked to her, you know, just briefly talked to her. And, when I go into the meeting, she is like clueless. The principal, she's clueless. She has no idea who Karen is, what's wrong with her, what-what is what's going on in the classroom. She didn't take the time to go and look at her file to see what's going on with Karen. She didn't go into the class to see what was going on. You know, you'd think you'd do this before you had a meeting with somebody. It was just like--and she was just like totally clueless, like oh, my gosh. (Robin)

After the above mentioned meeting, the conflict continued until a school system level administrator got involved. The parent expressed her agreement with the system's special education administrator as follows:

So, you know. . . I think it was the lady that dictates, it was the one that . . . would see Karen all the time and she understood Karen with no problem. And she could just pour it all out. I mean, lay it all out. And, this is the way you have to be with Karen. . . . . She said, "I think what Mrs. Roberts is trying to explain to you by this is what Karen needs and this is how you need to do it. Da-da-da-." And it was just—It was great. I had said that and she hadn't heard me, and again, it was nice to have somebody, actually above me or in the in the school system or something to say something to her (the teacher). They question why the assistant principal is in there, and, you know, he's trying to avoid having any kind of conflict or anything. He doesn't want to start any fights or anything. (Robin)

Still other parents had concerns about principals overall knowledge of special education. One parent described this situation:

In fact, he told us, he told us at one of our many meetings this school year, well, when we started coming to him in the spring, he didn't know anything about autism or special ed., "but we are we, are educating him—whether he likes it or not." But, his-his first reaction was to defend the teacher regardless of what she does. He knows nothing about what goes on in that classroom. (Sarah)

Many of the school-based studies outlined in the literature review in Chapter 2 focused on the principal's response to conflict, but not necessarily related to special education (Cascadden, 1998; Fris, 1992; Marshall et al., 1996). As additional studies and

commentaries were sought to corroborate or counter the findings, articles by Soodak (2002) and Delaney (2001) were found that discussed the administrator's role in providing inclusive services. Also, Patterson's (2000) research indicated that principals are poorly prepared for the responsibilities related to the provision of special education services and corroborated the perspective of parents in the present study that a need exists for principals to understand special education compliance issues.

Teacher Competence in Inclusive Environments

Each parent noted a need for teachers to be trained to provide services to students with disabilities within an inclusive environment. Complaints were lodged by parents against special education teachers as well as general education teachers. One complaint was that one experienced special education teacher did not feel comfortable providing services in an inclusive environment and continued to push for a self-contained setting. One parent shared the story of a general education teacher's unwillingness and lack of understanding of children with special needs. One teacher's inability to forge the necessary relationships with other staff members to make inclusive services a reality was reported.

Parents told of instances in which they felt their suggestions were more effective than the methods used by teachers whom they felt should be better trained. Concerns about particular schools' models of providing inclusive services reoccurred. According to parents, some schools adopted an anti-inclusion stance, while others only offered services in an inclusive environment. Often these models resulted in a situation where students had very little contact with an actual special education teacher and their services were delivered primarily by instructional assistants. Overall, most parents agreed that they

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would like their child to interface with typically developing peers for at least a portion of the day, but all were concerned about the methods incorporated to make this a reality.

One parent shared her perception about a special education teacher's attitude towards inclusion in this way:

> She already from day one wanted Kathy in self-contained. She just didn't make any bones about it. I mean, you know, I mean at first I think she tried a little bit, but, because of her lack of knowledge that she just was—you know, "I need to get her in my environment." (Lisa)

Another parent was frustrated with the general education teacher's skills. She shared that frustration.

> It was apparently only happening in the kindergarten class (behavior problems). And, now that we discovered that it was mostly because the teacher knew nothing about how to deal with Karen. I mean it took me three or four meetings to finally get to the teacher. Hello, this, you know. You have to repeat things to Karen. She is not a normal child. I mean, she is not like a typical child in class, where you can, you know, you can tell them, hey, go pick up this book and put it over here. You know, she doesn't take it in all of the time so you have to repeat things like a couple of times, and then she'll get it. You have to look at her to get her attention. Her attention is just not there all the time. (Robin)

One parent had observed a previous special education teacher's success in developing relationships with other staff to insure that special education students had access to general education opportunities, and compared the teacher described in the conflict's lack of ability to develop relationships with general education staff.

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And in the absence of that teacher with this new teacher who couldn't seem to

make any relationships with any other teachers… He has nothing going in his

concept of what he is here to do with and get the kids to learn. It just wasn't going

on there. He was very combative, very defensive. It did not matter what I said that

really sort of is the end of that story. (Regan)

Providing inclusive instruction and supports was a service delivery issue thus

connecting it to Lake and Billingsley's (2000) study. The literature review conducted

subsequently to the collection of these data indicated that many authors wrote about this

subject. Oremland and Kieff (2002) spoke about developing relationships and strategies

for inclusive environments. Soodak, Winter and Turnbull (2002) made recommendations

concerning how to provide services in inclusive environments while Delaney (2001)

discussed the administrator's role in building inclusive services. Mock and Kauffman

(2002) discussed whether inclusion for all is even a reasonable goal. They expressed

concern about the lack of specialization occurring in inclusive settings.

Evidence that Staff Would Be Held Accountable for Providing Special Education

Parents indicated that evidence that the staff would be held accountable for

providing special education would have been helpful in managing the conflict. The most

telling examples of a lack of accountability occurred when parents asked for

documentation illustrating their child's progress and the documentation was not

presented. An example follows:

They don't want to put anything in writing. You know, the only reason the speech

therapist said that [admitted that the child was regressing] is that she and I are

friendly. She's the only one who is in the whole county system who seems to care

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about him. And she-she talks to me about him, but I can't go and tell anybody I can't tell anybody what she tells me because she'll—she'll lose her job. And yet no one is putting anything in writing. She-she has started to because I asked her to. Just please write it down. Please, all we've gotten since we've been here is sugar-coated everything. Everything is sugar coated. Everything is just wonderful, and that's all we've ever gotten since we've been here— reports from the teacher, reports from the therapists, everything's wonderful. It's not wonderful. Finally, at least, the speech therapist is starting to, at least, put some of that in writing, and, uh, this OT who is new, I have talked with her, and she's documenting core things. How he can't focus he can't concentrate. (Sarah)

Parents made reference to situations in which they shared their concerns with administrators and perceived that the administrators would not hold the teachers accountable:

And the principal said, "Well, I told the teacher to get the visual schedule."

And, you know, I'm thinking in three years of working with this woman, trusting her, and thinking that she cared about my kids . . .. I just looked at her immediately and said, "He didn't do it. Why didn't you make him? Why didn't you make him?" (Regan)

Another parent shared this example of a principal not holding a teacher accountable:

She allowed this child to escape from her classroom because of lack of judgement. That wasn't an accident, that was negligence, and my son is going down the tubes behaviorally, and I– we have been through and my husband and I

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have had at least one meeting with this principal every week since school started, and I have had maybe several meetings with him every single week since school has started. I am concerned about this aid, and we know her, and we know that she is not the right person for him. We are concerned about his teacher, that we don't trust her, and he knows all of this. I mean "How about if you call her, like once a week and that way she can answer your questions." That's not going to happen because I don't trust her. Then, so the teacher said, she's sitting there "What?" And I said, "Come on." It's you know, I said, "Is this news to you that I feel this way?" She says, "I think I get along all right with you. I just work—I just work so hard with your son"— and bla-bla-bla-bla. So the principal he comes up with "Mrs. Lacy is a good teacher, and she puts in a lot of hours she really does try." (Sarah)

The literature did not examine teacher accountability to a marked degree; nor, did the subject emerge very much in the discussions with the teachers and principals in the present study. In the literature accountability seemed to be couched in methods for documenting progress (Kabot, 2003; Houvteen & Van de Grift, 2001).

Staff Demonstrating Trustworthy Behavior

This finding resonated throughout the present study. Developing and maintaining trust was one of the seven themes that emerged from the conflict literature. The theme continued through the parent interviews and teacher work groups, and emerged from the survey results as one of the major findings. Following are examples of how the lack of trust contributed to the conflicts described by the parents in the interviews.

This is what she does. And, uh, and they sat there in the due process and totally

lied. And we had proof. We would sit there like, the, the, the resource teacher

would say, um, you know, um, "Kathy is not making sufficient progress on her

IEP." And then we'd bring out the little report card thing that they send home.

Every time it would say, sufficient progress, sufficient progress, and her

signature, and I say, well, "what is this?" She'd say, "well, that looks like she's

making sufficient progress, but she's really not." Harry was posing the questions.

"So you're telling me, you signed a document saying she's making sufficient

progress, but that's not really what you meant, and we're supposed to know that?"

(Lisa)

One parent shared an incident when the true purpose of a meeting was not

disclosed and she found herself in this compromised position:

All of a sudden this is no longer a meeting to address the issues what do these

children need in the class room and why are they having such problems. It's all of

a sudden a meeting about how squirrelly and wormy and slimy my husband is.

And, how dare he do any such things and Hernandez turns to me--me, and I'm not

even accused of having made phone calls to try to find out the credentials of a

teacher, which, apparently, even though that supposedly is public information, is

not something which school systems choose to share with us. And, uh, Hernandez

gave me a five minute lecture on how I should trust the school, and I was shocked

and I mentioned it in the meeting that I was shocked to have the meeting co-opted

when, I felt, my child had such serious issues, and, I was shocked to be lectured.

But I did not want to, and I did not say anything that would suggest that I wasn't

really listening. So I listened to Hernandez, and, I didn't say anything like (nervous laughter) I would have liked to say along the lines "how dare you lecture me about trust when I have trusted the school system for-five years now." I had started to research about autism and I was beginning to find out the level of burden that is placed on the school in terms of appropriate placement. I was beginning to figure out what had happened to my children. They were ready to be mainstreamed. The school didn't provide they didn't suggest the children needed any kind of support. Autistic children placed in mainstream classrooms need support. I didn't know they were supposed to have support. You know, I haven't previously spent a year educating myself on how does one educate autistic children. I thought the school would do that. And, I had trusted the school for five years, and they—pardon my French—"Screwed my children." (Regan)

These are just two examples of the accounts shared in which parents felt that the school division had been less than honest. The literature supported that developing and maintaining trust is a fundamental component of managing conflict (Budoff & Orenstein, 1982; Katz & Lawyer, 1993; Marshall et al., 1996).

Evidence that Accommodations were Provided in The Classroom

Parents recommended proving that accommodations were provided in the classroom as a strategy to manage special education conflicts at the school level. This parent shared this information as part of her conflict description:

There was no OT sensory diet um, and sensory input incorporated in the course of the day is required by Art's IEP. There wasn't so much as a visual schedule in the classroom, which is in the IEP. Um, Art was made to sit for 50 minutes straight

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doing math, which is, which violates his, his, you know, the every 20 minutes

frequent breaks provision in his IEP. (Regan)

Other parents relayed similar information:

Let's bring in the T-TAC team from George Mason. As a parent, I can't contact

them, but you guys can contact them. We need somebody fresh in here to give us

some ideas. Well it took from January until April for the school to finally contact

George Mason. And, um, they um, um, the T-TAC person came out. Um, She

had, I was there. She said "Fine, you can come and observe while I'm there." She

had some wonderful ideas. She said, you know, "this child belongs in this

classroom." And, nothing, by then it was April, school is over like, gosh, end of

May June, I guess it was June but, um, but none of the ideas were put in place.

There was opportunities and there were things that the school could have done to

you know, to reach out to find different ways of doing things, get different

perspectives, and they just didn't want to do it. (Lisa)

The parents in the present study specifically recommended providing

accommodations as a conflict management strategy at the school level. The teacher work

groups had related sub-categories under the major headings of providing appropriate

services and determining appropriate placement. Lake and Billingsley (2000), Vitello,

(1999) and the CADRE (2004) study all made reference to providing appropriate services

and their relation to the escalation or the de-escalation of special education conflict.

Accommodations, as required components of a child's IEP, can be viewed as an essential

part of providing appropriate services.

Interviews with Principals:

Providing Implications for Policies and Practices Related to the Findings

Following Gersten's and Baker's (2000) precedent of reciprocal translation in which each step of the study serves to inform the next step, elementary principals were interviewed and were asked to respond to the findings by providing implications for policies and practices in their schools. They identified the following actions as strategies to incorporate into schools to insure that the recommendations were put into place: (a) communicating effectively; (b) differentiating instruction; (c) training in special education compliance; (d) observing classrooms; and (e) earning trust.

Principals and Communicating Effectively

All the principals concurred that communication was an important element to incorporate in managing special education conflict. Methods suggested were (a) e-mail; (b) phone calls; (c) formal and informal meetings; (d) daily notebooks; and (e) regular newsletters. One principal summed this concept up well with this comment: "It goes without saying that communication is important in this business." This response to the findings relates back to the original themes of building relationships and listening reflectively.

Principals and Differentiated Instruction

Differentiating instruction for learners was a prevalent theme in the principal interviews. Differentiated instruction involves modifying instruction and assignments to fit the students' level. Although differentiation is not synonymous with specialized instruction in which students' programs are individualized to address their disability-related needs in an effort for them to benefit from special education services, most

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administrators alluded that the hallmark of a teacher capable of providing special education services in an inclusive environment hinged upon his or her ability to differentiate. Tomlinson (2001), Petig (2000), and Kapusnick (2001) have written about differentiation, however not necessarily in relation to providing special education instruction.

Principals and Training in Special Education Compliance

Principals relayed that mechanisms existed in their school systems to keep them abreast of special education compliance issues. These mechanisms included: (a) regularly scheduled system-wide meetings to disseminate information; (b) policy manuals; and (c) informal interactions with knowledgeable colleagues. Patterson (2000) commented that knowledge of compliance issues was a weakness among most administrators.

Principals and Observation

Principals conveyed that observation was necessary to insure implementation of the IEP and to insure accommodations are in place. One principal summed up the purpose of observations by saying "I observe what's going on. That's the physical evidence."

Principals and Earning Trust

The principals emphasized the importance of earning trust; however, specifics concerning how an individual or an organization might earn trust were not forthcoming. One principal emphasized that taking responsibility for one's mistakes was helpful in earning trust, while others spoke of promoting value systems such as "Children First," or the Golden Rule. This concept of earning trust was reflected in the original seven themes related to the nature of conflict and its management.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

The multi-vocal synthesis provided the stakeholders an outlet to present their perspectives on the effective management of special education conflict at the school level. This chapter examines how the collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing of the data sets resulted in three major themes: (a) providing specialized services; (b) partnering with parents; and (c) demonstrating accountability. The themes from the initial review of conflict related literature indicated that descriptive data from stakeholders involved with special education conflicts at the school level were missing. As a consequence, themes were developed from the parent interviews that were used to create descriptive scenarios. The scenarios were presented to teacher work groups that made recommendations. The parents responded to a survey that included the teacher recommendations. Administrators were presented with questions directly related to the six recommendations validated by the parents, and they provided implications for policies and practices for managing special education conflict in their schools. After the collection of each data set, recurrent components were noted, clustered together into sub-categories, and ultimately refined into major categories. A subsequent review of literature related to these categories was conducted so that these themes, which represent the perspectives that prevailed across data sets, might be discussed in conclusion.

Limitations

Any study has limitations that hamper the application of findings and conclusions beyond the present sample of participants. In considering this study's conclusions,

readers are reminded of the limitations and delimitations affecting the transferability of these results. As noted in Chapter 1, this study was intentionally limited to conflicts involving children in kindergarten through third grade in a specific region of a southeastern state. Parental participants voluntarily identified themselves as parents of children receiving special education services. It is impossible to ascertain how closely this volunteer sample resembled the total group of parents of children receiving special education services embroiled in a school-based special education conflict. Because of the sensitive nature of this topic, the descriptions of the conflicts provided by these parents are necessarily one-sided. The teachers in the work groups were not associated with the specific conflicts and unfamiliar with these parents. They were, however, teachers aspiring to be administrators, and the principals who participated were leaders of elementary schools. Discussion of their collective perspectives resonates with the perspective of the academic community, especially as reflected through the second review of research addressing issues in the special education literature. In the following section, the following conclusions are discussed in depth: (a) providing specialized services; (b) partnering with parents; and (c) demonstrating accountability.

<center>Managing Conflict by Providing Specialized Services</center>

Faithfully providing specialized instruction and services to students in accordance with their IEPs was identified as an effective strategy in managing special education conflict at the school level. All of the conflicts described in the interviews with parents stemmed from the lack of provision of specialized services. Specialized instruction is instruction uniquely designed for the benefit of a specific child and its personalized design is required by special education law. Throughout the reciprocal layers of data

collection, topics related to specialized instruction emerged with the exception of the initial search of the conflict literature. The professional community of teachers, and administrators suggested that these components could promote specialized instruction: (a) differentiated instruction; (b) staff development/training; (c) direct classroom observation; and (d) professional collaboration. In contrast, the parents noted the lack of these elements in their child's educational program (Table 5-1).

The absence of literature related to special education school-based conflict and the provision of specialized services is apparent in the table. In the initial literature review references to providing specialized instruction were not prevalent or reflected in the seven themes: (a) building relationships; (b) listening reflectively; (c) developing and maintaining trust; (d) defining the problem; (e) controlling the emotional pitch; (f) equalizing the power base; and (g) utilizing a third party. In retrospect, this is not surprising because minimal studies had been conducted on the topic of special education conflict at the school level. Lake and Billingsley's (2000) findings did note that disagreements about service delivery did contribute to the escalation of conflict between parents of students receiving special education services and school systems. Possibly, not enough literature existed to analyze and determine service delivery as an initial theme, further supporting the argument for a need to conduct a multi-vocal synthesis on the topic of special education conflict at the school level.

Differentiated Instruction

One common complaint from parents was that they did not see evidence that specialized instruction was occurring in their child's classroom. Although parents did not

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Table 5.1

Components that Promote Specialized Instruction

Area	Initial literature review	Parents	Teachers	Administrators	Final literature Review
Differentiated Instruction		X	X	X	X
Staff Development/ Training		X	X	X	X
Observation		X	X	X	X
Collaboration		X	X	X	X

use the term differentiated instruction, they gave examples of services and instruction that had not been differentiated or personalized to meet their child's special needs. The concept of differentiated instruction was prevalent in the data collected from the professional community. Differentiated instruction is a method incorporated to meet the needs of smaller groups of children in a classroom setting. The content of the instruction is varied, and material is presented so children can learn through different modalities. For example, a tape may be read for a child that is an auditory learner, or a tactile learner may glue sand onto letters. Also, different ways of assessing progress may be utilized. Some children may give an oral response to test questions while others may write an essay. Although, one may argue that differentiated instruction is not individualized and specialized to the degree described in some IEPs, members of the professional community seemed to view specialized and differentiated instruction as interchangeable.

Staff Development

The professional community advocated staff development to equip school personnel to provide specialized instruction. Although the parents did not use that exact terminology, four out of five parents made comments about the need for teachers to receive additional training at some point. Staff development simply defined in this context would be on-the-job-training. The professional community made several suggestions about the delivery of staff development. Staff development could be delivered in: (a) formal in-service; (b) in the classroom with one staff member offering constructive criticism to another; and/or (c) a discussion format to brainstorm strategies for serving special education students. According to the professional community and

parents, staff development needed to be offered so that professional competence could be built in the following areas: (a) collaborating in an inclusive environment; (b) differentiating instruction; and (c) complying with special education policies.

Observation

The professional community and parents made references to observation. All the parents had their children observed in their educational setting when concerns arose. Three parents had central office administrators, or an outside party acting as the child's advocate, observe their child in the classroom. All the stakeholders agreed that direct observation was helpful in insuring that specialized instruction was occurring. Administrators and teachers conveyed that observations could serve two purposes: (a) to determine if specialized instruction was occurring, and (b) to provide a springboard to strategize about how to improve the educational program.

Collaboration

Parents noted a lack of collaboration in the schools. The importance of special education teachers and general education teachers forming relationships to insure positive inclusive environments was noted. Parents noted a lack of competence among professionals in working as a team. Some were certain that special education teachers could provide excellent instruction in a resource room, but could not adapt to working with a general education teacher in a general education environment. Some felt the general education teachers needed support from the special education teachers.

The professional community considered greater collaboration to be a need as well. Teachers and administrators noted a need for more peer to peer assistance in the school

environment, communication among staff members, joint planning time, and shared ownership of the classroom.

Conclusions Related to Providing Specialized Instruction

The participants' responses suggest that providing specialized instruction is helpful in managing conflict. Their perspectives pinpointed these areas to strengthen the likelihood of provision of specialized instruction: (a) monitoring to insure that differentiated instruction occurs; (b) providing staff development in differentiated instruction, professional collaboration, and special education compliance issues; (c) observing in classroom; and (d) collaborating among professionals. The lack of literature from the parental perspective linking the provision of specialized services to the management of special education school-based conflict seems to suggest that their perspectives' need further inquiry.

<center>Managing Conflict by Partnering with Parents</center>

Partnering with parents proved to be an issue in providing special education. The IDEA mandates that parents are a part of the decision making process in planning their child's educational program. The initial literature search was the most relevant in regard to the theme of partnering with parents. Themes related to partnering with parents that emerged across all data sets included (a) communication/listening, and (b) developing and maintaining trust (Table 5.2).

Communicating/Reflectively Listening

Communicating involves sharing information between two parties. For the purposes of this study, the parties included parents of children with disabilities and school personnel. Simply defined, reflectively listening occurs when one party paraphrases the

Table 5.2

Themes That Emerged Across All Data Sets

Theme	Initial Lit. Review	Parents	Teachers	Administrators	Final Lit. Review
Communicating / Reflectively Listening	X	X	X	X	X
Developing and Maintaining Trust	X	X	X	X	X

information that has been shared from the other party to check for understanding of the information imparted (Margolis, 1987).

The initial literature search emphasized that communicating and/or reflectively listening was helpful in managing conflict. Sources alluded to the importance of reflective listening (Budoff & Orenstein, 1982; Margolis, 1987). Budoff's and Orenstein's study dealt specifically with special education conflict at the system level and conveyed that many of the conflicts studied could have been better managed if school system personnel would have listened and taken parents' concerns seriously. Margolis (1987) provided a commentary on general school-based conflict and offered these recommendations related to communicating and reflectively listening. He suggested

school division personnel (a) listen more than they talk, (b) summarize the other parties' message, (c) be aware of the emotional aspects as well as the facts shared, and (d) ask questions to get the precise meaning of the parties' message (p. 218).

The aforementioned components were mirrored in the responses of the parents and professional communities in this study as well. Responses included references made to taking parents suggestions seriously, and developing a stance of always being available to communicate with parents.

Developing and Maintaining Trust

This theme was prevalent across all data sets starting with the initial literature review and continuing on to the administrator's implications. Budoff and Orenstein (1982) concluded that once a breach of trust has occurred between the schools and parents restoring that trust is very difficult. Informing parents of all options available was a prevalent theme.

Conclusions Related to Partnering with Parents

All of the data sets identified components related to the topic of partnering with parents. Parents noted that relationships with school personnel impacted their children's education, and communication and trust were factors in their conflict descriptions. Teachers included earning trust and communication under the heading of improving parent involvement. Principals responded to the findings by suggesting that incorporating effective communication methods and earning trust were strategies that would help with the management of special education conflicts at the school-level. This overall conclusion has a strong link to the seven themes derived from the conflict literature: (a) building relationships; (b) listening reflectively; (c) developing and maintaining trust; (d) defining

the problem; (e) controlling the emotional pitch; (f) equalizing the power base; and (g) utilizing third parties.

<div align="center">Managing Conflict by Demonstrating Accountability</div>

The prevailing themes from the initial literature review did not include accountability, but issues of accountability emerged in the parent interviews, teacher work-groups, and administrator interviews (Table 5.3). Parents' references to accountability closely related to the day to day mechanism of instruction, for example the sending home of anecdotal records. Administrators and teachers promoted accountability through more formal evaluation processes some of which are mandated in IDEA.

Table 5.3

Methods of Demonstrating Accountability

Method	Initial Lit. Review.	Parents	Teachers	Administrators	Final Lit. Review
Informal Evaluations		X	X	X	X
Formal Evaluations		X	X	X	X
Sanctioning Staff		X	X	X	X

Evaluation

The main method promoted as a means of insuring accountability was through educational evaluation and assessment. Four out of five parents were in the process of obtaining private evaluations from psychologists outside the school system, a strategy allowed by the IDEA in circumstances when conflicts escalate. Some of these parents disagreed with the special education designation applied to their child's disability, and all of them saw the outside evaluations as a method to gain a better educational placement for their child. Two out of five parents stated when they requested data related to their child's day to day progress towards IEP objectives, that the data were not presented.

Both groups of participants in the professional community also emphasized evaluations. Teachers and administrators seemed to have a great deal of confidence in the evaluation guidelines outlined in IDEA for determining whether a child's disability warranted the provision of special education. The teachers made reference to periodic progress reports and evaluations as did the administrators. However, only one member of the professional community, an administrator, made reference to assessment methods that would give insight into the daily activities children engage in an effort to reach their IEP goals. It is interesting to note that this type of assessment provided the kind of information in which parents were most interested.

Sanctioning Teachers

Each of the parents had concerns about the skill level of teachers and instructional assistants working with their children. Many of the conflict descriptions showed situations in which lack of confidence was conveyed to administrators and the administrators did not respond. The issue of sanctioning staff emerged to a small degree

in the teacher work groups. Only two administrators made reference to confronting staff members when they were not acting in an accountable fashion.

Conclusions Related to Demonstrating Accountability

Topics related to demonstrating accountability included formal and informal evaluation as well as sanctioning teachers. Issues of appropriate evaluation and assessment emerged in the review of the special education literature to some degree. Kabot (2003) suggested that in designing the IEP, team members should consider how progress would be measured. Carta (2002) asserted that good measurement instruments for young children do not exist, and the study completed by CADRE (2004) maintained that evaluations were a topic related to parents pursuing a formal mechanism to resolve special education conflict.

Implications for Practice

The themes associated with managing school-based special education conflict in this study have implications for practice in the areas of professional development, partnerships with parents, and the meaningful assessment of young children with disabilities.

Professional Development

Prepare Teachers to Provide Specialized Instruction

To manage special education conflict at the school level effectively, staff development is needed. If staff development is made available teachers could have the skills to determine appropriate instructional methods and deliver specialized instruction to young children with disabilities. The information across the data sets seem to suggest that providing specialized instruction may be effective in managing conflict. Perhaps

conflict would be absent in the presence of specialized instruction. Public funds could

be made available as incentives to attract highly qualified special education teachers and

to retain them. Highly qualified teachers may be more skilled in providing specialized

instruction leading to a decrease in conflict over that particular issue. Teacher preparation

programs could emphasize the use of research-based instructional methods. If pre-

service programs emphasized research-based instructional methods, specialized

instruction may increase; therefore decreasing conflict at the school-level These teachers

could be prepared to evaluate specific methods used in classrooms to determine their

efficacy for individual students with special needs. At a minimum, discussion of the

particular methods incorporated to assist a special education student in reaching his or her

goals should be discussed during the development of the IEP. Openness and flexibility

should be the order of the day since the "I" in IEP stands for *Individualized.* When

families sensed that their child's specialized instructional needs were being met, conflict

could decrease.

School personnel should be prepared to implement a variety of specific methods

and to include parents in discussions of preferred methodologies. However, it is

important for parents to realize that the ultimate choice of methods used for instruction

rests legally with the school system and not with parental requests.

Prepare Paraprofessionals to Support the Delivery of Specialized Instruction

Parents suggested that paraprofessionals provided some or the majority of their

child's special education instruction. At the very least, training could be provided for

paraprofessionals. Also, school personnel could consider the demands of the job when

hiring instructional assistants. For instance, one parent reported that an elderly

instructional assistant with limited mobility was hired to work with her son who had a propensity to bolt from the classroom. Providing researched models to demonstrate how special education services can be provided efficaciously utilizing instructional assistants has potential for improving special education services. The data collection suggested that the lack of provision of specialized services was a catalyst for conflict; therefore, training for paraprofessionals who provide services may be effective in managing conflict.

Provide Training to School Personnel in Inclusive Teaching Practices

Each of the parents interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with their child's level of inclusion in general education classes or with how inclusive services were delivered. One parent described a general education teacher as viewing her child's participation in the general education classroom as a privilege, and the child needed to prove her worthiness or be sent back to the special education classroom. Another parent viewed her child's teacher as competent in providing services in a resource setting, but unskilled in the inclusive setting. Another parent perceived that her child's teacher did not possess the social skills necessary to form relationships with the general education teachers; therefore, promoting inclusion was problematic.

The teacher work-groups recommended inclusive services training with an emphasis on strategies for collaboration, as did the administrators. Parental responses suggested that training was needed at all levels—from para-professionals to administrators—to insure that school personnel have the knowledge, skills, and resources to provide services to special education students in inclusive environments.

The importance of differentiating instruction was the over-riding theme in the administrators' interviews. Training is necessary to insure that all instructional staff

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members are capable of differentiating instruction, and have the appropriate resources to do so. Good models of implementing differentiated instruction in inclusive environments are needed. Staff development promoting providing specialized services across environments may be helpful in managing conflict at the school-building level.

<div align="center">Partnerships with Parents</div>

Building Trust

Once trust between school personnel and parents has been disrupted, managing conflict becomes much more difficult. The majority of the parents in this study reported feeling betrayed. They unanimously reported that staff acting in a trustworthy manner would have been helpful in managing the conflict. Teachers and administrators also emphasized the importance of maintaining trust. Perhaps when relationships are based on trust, issues could be discussed and resolved without fear. Maintaining trust could be helpful in managing conflict at the school-building level.

Regular Communication

Every effort could be made to insure that parents have as much knowledge about the issues surrounding their child's education as school personnel. An advocate or ombudsman can be helpful in making this a reality. The establishment of a good parent resource center might aid in this regard. Also, communication avenues need to be in place before conflicts emerge. Regular communication is key. School personnel should determine whether parents in particular cases will be contacted by phone weekly or with daily notes or e-mail—the method is not as important as the intentional commitment to communicate regularly. Allowing parents ready access to the classroom could also

increase parents' trust levels. Good communication may provide opportunities to resolve minor disagreements before the disagreements escalate into a larger conflict.

Each administrator emphasized the importance of maintaining parents' trust, but none provided a concrete example of how an environment is developed that promotes trust. Practical illustrations related to building trust among school personnel and parents of special education students would complement recent research on the meaning and measurement of trust in educational settings (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2002).

Demonstrating Accountability

Evidence should be provided that specialized instruction is actually being provided. The majority of parents reported that requests for data indicating that the specialized instruction described in the IEP was actually implemented was not forthcoming. Administrators and teachers reported a need to provide evidence of student progress, but relied on typical schedules of quarterly reports to provide feedback to parents.

Educators and parents need evidence-based methods to portray the school progress of young children. Researchers promoted portfolios for this endeavor (Kabot, 2003; Meinen, 2002; Mulenhart, 2002; Tilemma, 2001). A disconnect existed between the literature and practice. Teachers and administrators promoted formal methods of assessment, but parents were clearly dissatisfied with those methods as timely and relevant indicators of student progress. Conflicts could emerge from parents' perceptions that specialized services were not being provided. Data illustrating classroom performance could provide the evidence that the children were receiving specialized instruction thus eliminating parents' fears of the contrary.

Recommendations for Further Research

Is Staff Development the Answer?

Teachers and administrators focused on staff development as a means of preventing the conflicts illustrated in the conflict scenarios. This gives rise to the possibility of investigating whether a link exists between staff development and decreased conflict. If staff development does decrease conflict, are the staff development topics focused on providing specialized instruction, partnering with parents, or instituting methods of accountability—data collection, portfolio construction, or formal assessments? One could not rule out that parents could benefit from training highlighting the nuances of insuring that their children receive an appropriate education. With staff development promoted so highly in the professional community the opportunity to test the assumption that further skill development would aid in conflict management could be a worthy undertaking.

What Instructional Methods Promote Progress in Students Receiving Special Education Services?

The parents' descriptions of conflict included references to disagreements about appropriate instructional methods. This suggests a need to explore which instructional methods work well with students with various disabilities under various circumstances.

Does a Scarcity of Resources Promote Special Education Conflict?

Boulding (1963) stated that a scarcity of resources promoted conflict. Were the issues described in the parents scenarios the result of scarce resources? Is it possible that school personnel would have provided specialized services acceptable to the parents had there been more resources? Was the utilization of instructional assistants indicative of

budget constraints that prohibited hiring more teachers? The impact of scarce resources on special education conflict has the potential to be a fruitful area of study.

What Does the Delivery of Differentiated Instruction, Special Education in Inclusive Settings, the Utilization of Paraprofessionals in Special Education, and/or Developing an Environment to Promote Trust Look Like?

Parents reported that the aforementioned elements were missing in their child's education. Professionals promoted the importance of these elements; however, specific examples of how these elements might be incorporated in the school environment was lacking. Testing of models that incorporate differentiated instruction, special education in inclusive setting, utilization of paraprofessionals in special education settings, and/or developing an environment that promotes trust could provide a blueprint for professionals to follow.

What Are Meaningful Ways to Show Evidence that Students are Benefiting from Specialized Instruction?

Professionals were proponents of using the formal evaluation mechanisms used as guidelines in the majority of special education programs. Quarterly progress reports and standardized testing at pre-set intervals were suggested. The experiences conveyed by the parents suggested that they used formal testing as a means to change the special education designation of disability in an effort to get their child into a better program. Dismay at the lack of evidence that the specialized services were benefiting their child was expressed by the majority of the parents. Researchers indicated that a need exists to examine meaningful ways to describe benefits from specialized services.

Recommendations for Research

This study utilized the reciprocal strategy of multi-vocal synthesis to explore the topic of managing school-based special education conflict because this topic does not have a rich knowledge base in the professional literature. With regard to future research a case could be made that each data set could potentially be developed into an individual study. For example, data from the literature reviews could be used to replicate Ogawa's and Malen's (1991) study solely representing the academician's point of view.

Although a greater number of participants would enhance the study, data gathered from the parent interviews could be developed into a study about the parent's perspective on special education conflict. The same holds true for the administrator's perspective.

The themes developed from the work-groups have credibility because the three sets of data provided a means to insure triangulation. The teacher work-group process of this study also has the elements present to be developed into an individual study. Of course, if each data set was developed into an individual study the synthesis of all parties' points of view would be lost. For example, the fact that parents unanimously validated six recommendations proposed by teachers strengthened that steps' reliability.

Replicating and Strengthening this Study

My experience indicated that in researching this topic advocacy organizations were much more willing to refer participants than were school division personnel. Ideally the advocacy organization could provide a list of members to contact concerning this topic, and the members could be selected either randomly or purposefully rather than by referral. Random selection of a greater number of parents might have promoted a sample more reflective of parents at large that have had conflicts with school personnel over

special education services. Or purposeful selection of parents might have tightened the focus of the study allowing for more refined descriptions of special education conflict.

This same procedure could have been incorporated with the teachers and administrators. A larger number of parent and administrators might have given the study more credence. Incorporating fellow researchers to develop the themes from the interviews might have been both helpful for inter-rater reliability and work-load management. In retrospect, I may have had all the participants involved in the same work-groups. The notion of proceeding in this fashion and analyzing if the results are the same as the study I conducted is intriguing. Although, I still assert that the parents might have been stifled in a situation in which they were mixed in with groups of teachers and administrators.

Although the sample was small, reciprocal data collected allowed for themes to occur across each individual source. As stated earlier, each set of data from each work-group served to inform the other work-groups. In analyzing the strengths and weaknesses, and having the value of hindsight, I would change the study in this way. I would get lists of parents from advocacy organizations. I would call them engage them in the study. I would interview a larger sample

I would engage additional researchers to analyze the data and assist in the construction of the conflict scenarios. I would conduct work-groups of teachers. The procedure for the work-groups would remain consistent with the completed study. The work-groups would create categories of recommendations. I would have my co-researchers develop themes from the data accessed across the work-groups. I would not have gone back to have the parents validate the recommendations at this point, but would

have followed the same work-group procedure with the administrators. This would have provided the same advantages—work-group participants would have developed the recommendations to some extent, and each group would have served to inform the other groups. I would develop a similar survey incorporating both teachers' and administrators' perspectives and then presented the survey to the parents, using the results of this survey as the findings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this multi-vocal synthesis was to gain the perspectives of parents, teachers, and administrators about the recommendations and implications of managing special education conflict at the school-level. Themes that filtered through each participant's data sets were collapsed into three conclusions emphasizing the importance of (a) providing specialized instruction; (b) partnering with parents; and (c) demonstrating accountability for providing an appropriate education to young children with disabilities.

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APPENDIX A

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: Special Education Conflict Management at the School Building Level:
                A Multi-Vocal Synthesis
Investigators: Helen M. Neely (primary investigator)
                Jean B. Crockett (faculty advisor)

The Purpose of this Research Project

This research will address recommended practices in conflict management at the school level. Existing research studies focus primarily on the formal mechanisms of special education conflict resolution at either the state level or the school-division level. The focus of this research will be at the school building level. Research in this area has concentrated on the principals' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The goal of this research is to collect a range of perspectives on school-based special education conflict from parents, teachers, and administrators.

The intended outcome of this research is to generate recommendations and applications for school-based conflict management from the perspectives of both research and practice. The study will be guided by the following question: How are special education conflicts between schools and parents of children with disabilities effectively managed? Stakeholders' descriptions of school-based conflict and their recommendations for effectively managing conflict between schools and parents of children with disabilities will be collected and analyzed. Potentially, models for improved practice could be developed and evaluated from this information.

Procedures

An ongoing literature review will be conducted throughout the study. This will validate themes as they emerge in the work groups. Three work groups will provide data for this inquiry; (a) a parent work group; (b) a teacher work group; and (c) a special education school-based administrator work group.

Parental Description of Conflict

Six parents will be solicited through parent organizations, mediators, and school divisions. School divisions will randomly send letters to the families of children receiving special education services protecting students confidentiality. The first step will be collecting interview data from parents with children enrolled in special education from kindergarten through third grade. The parents will respond to the question: How would you describe your personal experience with school-based special education conflict? Parents will characterize the outcomes of their conflicts as successful or unsuccessful. The outcome of this data collection will be the construction of a set of conflict scenarios.

Teacher Work Groups

Kindergarten through fifth-grade teacher work groups will review the conflict scenarios developed by parents. The teachers will develop recommendations for managing the conflicts illustrated in these scenarios. The scenarios will be e-mailed to the teachers prior to the work group sessions; therefore, work group time will be reserved to discuss the recommendations and will not be spent in reviewing the descriptions.

Advertisements in elementary school newsletters and faculty information sources will be posted to attract 12 teacher participants to form two work groups. If necessary, Morgan's (1998) piggyback method of scheduling groups in conjunction with another event (where a critical mass of kindergarten through fifth-grade teachers would congregate) will be employed.

Parent Validation

After the completion of the teacher work groups, the parents who created the conflict scenarios will validate the teachers' recommendations. These recommendations for resolving special education conflicts at the school level will then be presented to an administrator work group.

Administrator Work Group

Elementary school administrators will review the scenarios and the validated recommendations, considering implications for policies that promote good practices for managing conflicts in the day to day activities of the school. The six administrative participants will be interviewed in small groups or individually.

Participant's Time Commitment

Parent participants can expect a three-hour total time commitment. Parents will be given the opportunity to describe their conflict fully. If critical information is missing from the scenario, the investigator may ask for more details. It is anticipated that the parents' full time commitment on the first segment of this project, developing conflict scenarios, should not exceed two hours. Their following validation of the conflict resolutions posed by the teachers should not take more than an hour.

The teachers will review a selection of conflict scenarios and make recommendations. Each teacher can expect to spend two hours reviewing the scenarios prior to coming to the work group. Two hours will be allocated to developing the recommendations in the formal work groups.

The administrators will review the teachers' recommendations and derive applications concerning how the recommendations could be incorporated into the day to day activities of the school. This should take one to two hours. The format, group or individual, will be determined by the principals' responses. If feasible, this information will be gathered in a small group format. If logistics prohibit this from happening, individual interviews will be conducted.

Risks and Benefits

There are no risks to the human subjects in this research. Benefits to the participants include opportunities to discuss special education conflict management strategies at the school level. At the conclusion of the research, each participant will be offered a summary of the research results and, as a second benefit, the researcher will offer to present an administrative in-service in the school districts focused on promising practices for resolving school-based special education conflicts.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

Confidentiality will be assured in this study. School divisions and individuals will be assigned pseudonyms. Only the investigator will have access to the raw data. Audiotapes will be secured in the investigator's home with the exception of the times they will be in the hands of a professional transcriber. Tapes will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

Compensation

No monetary compensation will accompany participation in this study.

Freedom to Withdraw

At any point during the study participants may choose to withdraw.

Approval of Research

This research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic and State University, and by the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understanding that depending on my role I will fulfill the following responsibilities:

Parents
- to participate in a taped or electronically submitted interview not to exceed two hours
- to devote no more than one hour in the validation of the teacher work group recommendations

Teachers
- to devote no more than two hours reviewing the conflict scenarios prior to attending the teacher work groups
- to participate in a two hour teacher work group to develop school-based conflict resolution recommendations

Administrators
- to devote one to two hours reviewing teacher recommendations and developing school-based applications

Subject's Permission

        I have read and understand the conditions of this project and my role within the project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. Based on the information provided above, I give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

        I understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the conditions outlined in this document.

Signature	Date

Direct questions to Helen M. Neely (703) 533-7650 or Dr. Jean Crockett (540) 231-4546.

APPENDIX B

Research Questions

(1) How are special education conflicts between school division personnel and parents of children with disabilities effectively managed?

(2) As a parent, could you describe a conflict you have had with the school division personnel?

(3) As a school employee, how would you recommend resolving the conflict scenarios described by the parents?

(4) As a school building level administrator, what are the implications related to the recommendations?

APPENDIX C

Conflict Scenario #1

Tommy Adams is eight years old. His pre-natal history and delivery were uneventful. He met each developmental milestone on time and seemed on track for typical development until approximately 18 months when he received a series of childhood immunizations. Afterwards, his temperature soared and he was hospitalized. Following hospitalization, Tommy began to engage in ritualistic behaviors and tantrum at the least provocation. His speech was slow in developing and his eye gaze was fleeting. At age two, his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Adams, sought special education preschool services through the public schools. Tommy was given the special education designation of developmentally delayed

Tommy's preschool services emphasized self-help skills, social skills, and kindergarten readiness skills. Tommy made steady progress and entered kindergarten at age five. Although, his parents were beginning to believe that Tommy had autism, the eligibility committee suggested that he continue to carry the developmentally delay label. He attended his neighborhood school, Madison Elementary. Madison's principal, Mr. Meek advocated including children with special needs into the total school program. Tommy's special education teacher Ms. Manchester was young, enthusiastic and a top-notch educator. Supported with visual cues and an assistant Tommy continued to make steady progress in grades kindergarten through second grade.

In the middle of Tommy's second grade year, Mr. Meek was transferred to another school and a new principal Ms. Watson took his place. This event coincided with

Tommy's triennial special education eligibility. The eligibility committee met at the end of Tommy's second grade year. In attendance were the school psychologist Ms. Ortega, special education teacher Ms. Manchester, general education teacher Ms. Lovell, and principal Ms. Watson. Evaluation results were reviewed and Tommy's standard scores were two standard deviations below the mean in all areas. Mr. and Mrs. Adams asked if any evaluations had been conducted that would reflect upon Tommy's autistic like characteristics, and were answered in the affirmative. At this point, Tommy receiving a label of mentally retarded seemed apparent so Mr. and Mrs. Adams wanted to know how the autistic characteristics factored into the decision. The committee responded that Tommy did not possess enough characteristics on the scale to be considered autistic, and besides the label would not impact the program in which he would be served because Madison did not have a program for the autistic. Tommy's parents reluctantly agreed with the new label.

Later the I.E.P. team meeting convened. The team determined that Tommy would be served by Ms. Manchester, and third grade teacher Ms. Douglas. Two weeks into Tommy's third grade year, the Adams started receiving notes. The notes indicated that Tommy was having trouble following directions in his third grade classroom.

Mrs. Adams called Ms. Douglas to see how she could help resolve the problem. Ms. Douglas explained that not following her directives was not tolerated and Tommy was privileged to be in a general education classroom, and if he did not follow directions he would be sent back to the special education classroom.

Mrs. Adams made arrangements to observe Tommy in the third grade classroom. Tommy was rolling some round math manipulatives to a friend. Ms. Douglas became

incensed and wrote both boy's names on the board for misusing the math manipulatives. Mrs. Adams was pleased to see Tommy interacting with peers. During the observation, Ms. Douglas gave the class the verbal instruction to go to the bathroom, wash their hands, and line up. She did not incorporate visual cues so Tommy wandered around the room. After, the class was in line, Ms. Douglas berated Tommy for what seemed like an eternity for not following directions.

Mrs. Adams followed up the observation with a phone call. She politely explained that Tommy needed visual cues to follow directions. Ms. Douglas responded none of the other children need visual cues, and I expect all the children to follow my directions.

Mrs. Adams felt as if her suggestions held no credence with Ms. Douglas so she sought help from the principal, Ms. Watson. She requested that Tommy be moved out of Ms. Douglas classroom. Ms. Watson indicated that she would talk to Ms. Douglas about the situation and to give Tommy "more time."

Two weeks later a note came home. The note said, "Tommy did not get to go out for recess because he did not follow directions." Mrs. Adams contacted Ms. Douglas to inquire what had happened. Ms. Douglas said a substitute covered the class two days ago and she did not know what had happened. Tommy seemed to be confused when questioned about the incident, and a pattern was emerging in which Tommy was arriving home earlier and earlier on the bus.

Mrs. Adams contacted Ms. Watson once again. Ms. Watson agreed that the sketchy information surrounding the "behavior incident" was disconcerting and Mrs. Adams appealed to have Tommy moved from Ms. Douglas' class. Ms. Watson implored her to give Tommy "more time."

The winter holiday came and went, and January met the Adams with more negative notes about Tommy's behavior. Tommy doesn't follow directions… Tommy misuses classroom materials… Tommy does not stay on task….

Mrs. Adams went into observe again. Tommy was "bouncing off the walls" as his classmates wrote an essay. On that day, Mrs. Adams joined Tommy at his desk and showed Tommy the pictures from the story that the children were recapping in essay form. At that point, Mrs. Adams resolved that if Tommy was to be successful, he would have to receive programming to address his autistic characteristics.

The observation frustrated her so much that she went home and contacted an advocate for children with disabilities. She was shocked when she learned that one of the county schools had an autism program. She scheduled a meeting with Ms. Watson.

She confronted Ms. Watson concerning the fact that no one apprised her that an autism program was available. Ms. Watson responded with "If you don't like the programming here then move." Mrs. Adams responded by shouting, "If you would confront the incompetence around here, the school would be a lot better. I know more about children with special needs than the teachers do." Mrs. Adams slammed the door and left.

She conveyed the principal meeting debacle to her advocate. The advocate explained that all complaints about programming should be couched within the IEP; otherwise, school officials will not entertain them at all. Furthermore, they were in a quandary because obviously Tommy needed autism programming, but he was identified as mentally retarded. She suggested that they reconvene the IEP team and endeavor to get an evaluation that would result in changing Tommy's label.

The IEP meeting met as scheduled; however, in addition to the usual players the special education director Mr. Blair was in attendance. The triennial evaluation was reviewed. The team insisted that the label of mentally retarded was the appropriate label; however, the special education director suggested that since evidence existed that Tommy benefited from the use of visual cues perhaps Ms. Douglas should incorporate some into her routine. The special education director agreed to finance an independent evaluation, but refused to agree to a school transfer. No specific reasons were offered concerning why Tommy could not go to the school that had an autism program.

At this point, Tommy has entered fourth grade. Ms. Tolbert, his fourth grade teacher, is more open to suggestions and Tommy is making some progress. Evaluations are in process, and indicators are that the evaluations will provide evidence that Tommy's primary disability is autism.

APPENDIX D

Conflict Scenario #2

Molly Riley is a six year old that has the special education classification of mild mental retardation. Her parents became concerned at eighteen months when Molly was not walking at all and not talking as much as other children her age. They initiated services through an early intervention program, and at age two Molly received services through public special education preschool program. Her preschool experience was positive for both Molly and her family.

When Molly became kindergarten age, the IEP team developed an IEP for her to be served in an MR program with part-time inclusion in a general education kindergarten program. Her special education teacher was Miss Ellis and her kindergarten teacher was Mrs. Rothchild.

In October, Molly became more and more resistant about going to school. Her mother became concerned because Molly had always loved school. She wrote Miss Ellis a note stating her concern and requesting feedback in hopes of determining why Molly no longer wanted to attend school. She checked Molly's backpack in the afternoon hoping to get a clue about what was bothering Molly. Miss Ellis had not answered her note.

Mrs. Riley dialed the school, but Miss Ellis was gone. She left a message. The next day a struggle ensued when Molly had to get on the bus. Molly's mother worried all day about what could be the problem at school. Once again, she checked the book bag, but there was no response.

The next morning Mrs. Riley calls Miss Ellis. Miss Ellis assures Mrs. Riley that everything is fine and Molly is just going through a "phase." However, each morning is the same struggle as Molly goes to school.

Mrs. Riley continues to call Miss Ellis and is told Molly is going through a "phase." Finally Mrs. Riley arranges to observe Molly. She goes to Miss Ellis' classroom and stays three hours as Molly labels shapes, colors, and categorizes. All skills that Molly mastered in preschool. The children in the class are obviously not as capable as Molly.

Mrs. Riley questions when Molly is going to join the regular kindergarten class. Miss Ellis responds with "We don't do that here." Mrs. Riley is confused and bewildered, but she gathers her things and goes home.

The next day Mrs. Riley calls to make arrangements to meet with Miss Ellis. She calls for two more subsequent days without a response. On day three Miss Ellis is available. They agree to meet the next week.

Mrs. Riley informs Miss Ellis that Molly has inclusion services on her IEP. Miss Ellis explains that none of the kindergarten teachers are interested in having Molly in their classes because her assistant does not have time in her schedule to go to kindergarten. Mrs. Riley states that she will see what arrangements she can make with the principal to see that Molly is included.

Mrs. Riley requests to see a record of Molly's classwork. Miss Ellis says she would need time to organize that material, but they are working on colors, shapes, and categorization. Mrs. Riley explains that Molly mastered those skills in preschool, and she was hoping Molly would be working on letter-sound association in kindergarten. Miss Ellis replied with that's the reading teacher's job.

Mrs. Riley stopped by the office on her way out to make an appointment with Ms. Worsham, the principal. After, witnessing the secretary take care of a nose bleed and administer meds, she was told Ms. Worsham would call. Ms. Worsham called the next morning.

During the phone conversation Mrs. Riley expressed her concerns that Molly was in a self-contained special ed. class and was not working up to her potential. Ms. Worsham said "I'll see what I can do and get back with you."

A month passed and no word from Ms. Worsham. The winter break was fast approaching and Molly was still resistant about going to school and neither work; nor, communication came home in the book bag.

In January, Mrs. Riley made contact with Ms. Worsham again. She asked what arrangements had been made for Molly to attend the general education kindergarten class and if reading skills were taught in the self-contained class. Ms. Worsham said arrangements for general education would have to be made through an IEP meeting, and Molly needed a reading evaluation.

The IEP team met two weeks later. The principal, special education teacher and Mrs. Riley were present. Miss Ellis shared that even if proper accommodations were available Molly was not a candidate for general education inclusion because her skills were so low. Mrs. Riley asked if the reading evaluation had been completed, and was told no. She asked Miss Ellis what the next step towards reading would be for Molly. Miss Ellis replied, "I was trained to teach preschool and I don't know besides Molly doesn't identify letters how can she learn sounds." Two hours passed while Mrs. Riley attempted to ascertain just what Molly was learning during her kindergarten year when Mrs.

Worsham said "I have bus duty and I have to go. Are you going to sign this thing or not?" Mrs. Riley burst into tears and shook her head vehemently as she scurried from the principal's office. Mrs. Riley got out the flash cards that night and Molly identified every letter.

Because of the difficulties with the school, Mrs. Riley decided to seek outside help. She found a reasonable lawyer with a disabilities advocacy organization. She explained her situation and was told because she did not sign the most recent IEP presented to her that the IEP originally developed for the school year was still in force. She breathed a sigh of relief hoping that the lawyer could convince the school to make accommodations for Molly to be included.

Mrs. Riley contacted Ms. Worsham and requested that the IEP team be reconvened. Her lawyer, Ms. Trotter accompanied her. Much to her shock, the special education director was in attendance, as well as a psychologist. Miss Ellis and the team of experts explained how the IEP written for the kindergarten year was inappropriate since Molly's skills were low, low, low....Ms. Trotter asked the team to present some tangible evidence concerning Molly's skills, but none was forthcoming. The meeting ended with the team agreeing to evaluate Molly's skills and to extend a part-time playground monitor's hours so Molly could participate in the general education environment.

Things seemed to be improving; although, Molly seemed confused when questioned about her general education kindergarten experiences. Mrs. Riley wrote Miss Ellis to ask about what activities occurred in general education. Miss Ellis responded that she did "kindergarten stuff." When Mrs. Riley took her older daughter to Girl Scout's she met the kindergarten teacher's parent volunteer, and she exclaimed "You must know my

daughter Molly!" The volunteer replied, "I don't know a Molly, she must be in a different class." Mrs. Riley went on, "She's a little brown haired girl with glasses." The volunteer looked dismayed and said "Maybe I have seen her on the playground."

Upon investigation, Mrs. Riley discovered that "Molly's inclusion" consisted of spending 1/2 the day on the playground with the monitor. Later the school's evaluation found Molly's to be in 15th percentile in most areas. School has ended for the academic year, and Mrs. Riley considers Molly's kindergarten year a complete waste. She is paying for a private evaluation since the school secures outside evaluators in disputed cases and she does not trust anyone associated with the school.

APPENDIX E

Questionnaire

Improving the I.E.P. Process.

(1)   Changing the existing I.E.P. would have been effective in managing the conflict.

     (a) definitely agree
     (b) agree
     (c) disagree
     (d) definitely disagree

(2)   Following procedures for developing the I.E.P. would have been effective in managing the conflict.

     (a) definitely agree
     (b) agree
     (c) disagree
     (d) definitely disagree

(3)   Evidence that the I.E.P. was being followed in the classroom would have been effective in managing the conflict.

     (a) definitely agree
     (b) agree
     (c) disagree
     (d) definitely disagree

(4)   Reviewing my child's placement would have been effective in managing the conflict.

     (a) definitely agree
     (b) agree
     (c) disagree
     (d) definitely disagree

(5)   Improving the staff's education as it relates to I.E.P. procedures would have been effective in managing the conflict.

     (a) definitely agree
     (b) agree
     (c) disagree
     (d) definitely disagree

(6)   The staff exhibiting knowledge of how to teach students with different learning styles would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(7)   Evidence that the staff would be held accountable for providing an appropriate education for my child would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(8)   Administrators exhibiting knowledge of special education compliance issues would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(9)   Staff with specific skills assisting other staff members in improving skills would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(10)   Another party observing the classroom would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(11)   Staff demonstrating knowledge of providing special education services in an inclusive environment would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(12)   Completing adequate testing would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(13)   Reporting progress on a regular basis would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(14)   Conducting a private evaluation would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(15)   Specialize testing would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(16)   Consideration of a placement change would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(17)	Consideration of all special education disability categories or "labels" would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(18)	Improved communication between school staff and home would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(19)	Improved communication between administrators and home would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(20)	School staff responding to inquiries from home in a timely fashion would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(21)	Parent advocacy training would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(22)	Meaningful parent participation in educational decisions would have been effective managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(23) Staff demonstrating trustworthy behavior would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(24) Teacher and parents participating in partnership training would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(25) Parents participating in due process would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(26) Staff demonstrating professional behavior would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(27) Providing accommodations and supports in the classroom would have been effective in managing the conflict.

(a) definitely agree
(b) agree
(c) disagree
(d) definitely disagree

(28)   Providing access to the general education classroom would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(29)   Examining past successful educational interventions would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(30)   Informing parents of all placement options would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

(31)   Considering all placement options would have been effective in managing the conflict.

    (a) definitely agree
    (b) agree
    (c) disagree
    (d) definitely disagree

APPENDIX F

Curriculum Vitae

HELEN M. NEELY
2881 Kelly Square
Vienna, VA 22181
(703) 319-0881
rhneely@verizon.net

OBJECTIVE:

To obtain an administrative or early childhood teaching position with particular interests in early intervention, inclusion, and mediation.

EXPERIENCE

<u>Non-categorical Special-Education Program Teacher,</u> Graham Road Elementary, Fairfax County Public Schools, Falls Church, VA
- Taught Special Education in a multi-cultural environment with a modified school year calendar
- Collaborated with kindergarten, first and second grade teachers to serve students with disabilities in an inclusive environment.
- Coordinated with two instructional assistants, and related service personnel to deliver services.
- Served in Partners in Print Program to promote literacy in students' homes.
- Participated in literacy collaborative program.

<u>Preschool Center-based Teacher</u>, Waples Mill Elementary, Fairfax County Public Schools, Oakton, VA   August, 2001-July, 2003
- Designed lesson plans for class-based program.
- Collaborated with parents to deliver developmentally appropriate services in children's homes.
- Completed developmental evaluations.
- Served as liaison between school division and early intervention.
- Completed FCPS Teacher Technology Competencies

<u>Autism Program Teacher,</u> Hutchison Elementary, Fairfax County Public Schools, Herndon, VA   August, 1999-2001
- Collaborated with kindergarten teacher to serve students with autism in an inclusive environment.
- Modified lesson plans
- Adapted materials and designed accommodation plans
- Autism program team leader
- Served on inclusion team

Graduate Assistant, Special Education Administration, V.P.I. & S.U.
Blacksburg, VA   Summer 1998-August, 1999
- Served as Research Assistant preparing study on Special Ed. Administration skills
- Representative to Special Education Regional Meeting

Teacher of the Developmentally Delayed, Botetourt County Public Schools
Buchanan Elementary, Buchanan,   VA Fall, 1996 – Spring, 1998
- Team taught in general education Kindergarten class
- Modified lesson plans for students with special needs
- Adapted materials and designed accommodation plans

Special Education Administrative Intern, Floyd County Public Schools
Floyd, VA   Summer, 1997
- Co-authored funded grant for after school program
- Assisted in preparing Phonemic Awareness workshop
- Developed Internet skills and competencies in Microsoft works
- Assisted in transition plans for preschoolers
- Collaborated with community daycare to serve a behaviorally challenged student
- Participated in Family Assessment Planning Team meetings

Preschool Specialist, Giles County Public Schools
Pearisburg, VA   Fall, 1993 – Spring, 1996
- Coordinated all preschool referrals and conducted preschool assessments
- Collaboratively provided early intervention services in daycare centers, Head Starts, and in preschoolers' homes.
- Chaired Macy McClaugherty School's Child study team
- Served on the New River Valley Early Intervention Council, Head Start Advisory Committee, and as a consultant for the Giles County Special Education Advisory committee

Early Childhood Special Educator, Fauquier County Public Schools
Warrenton, VA   Fall 1989 – Fall, 1993
- Taught center-based Early Childhood Special Education
- Coordinated preschool referrals for Northern Fauquier County
- Coordinated Fauquier County's Parent Education program
- Mentored fellow teachers

Daycare Teacher, West End Children's Center
Alexandria, VA   Summer, 1989
- Taught class for two-year-olds in a multicultural setting.

Early Childhood Special Educator, Alexandria City Public Schools
Alexandria, VA   Spring, 1989
- Taught centerbased Early Childhood Special Education

Student Teaching, Page County
Luray Elementary, Luray VA   January-February 1989
- Student taught centerbased Early Childhood Special Education

Student Teaching, Harrisonburg City
Waterman Elementary,
Harrisonburg, VA   October-December 1988

Substitute Assistant Teacher, New River Community Action, Head Start
Christiansburg, VA   August-October 1988

Graduate Assistant, James Madison University Technical Assistance Center
Harrisonburg, VA   Fall, 1987 – Spring 1988.

Residential Director, Bridgewater College
Bridgewater, VA   Fall, 1986 – Fall, 1987

House Parent, Presbyterian Children's Home of the Highlands
Wytheville, VA   Fall, 1985- Fall, 1986

EDUCATION

VPI & SU, Blacksburg, Virginia, QCA 3.8
    Doctoral Candidate, Special Education Administration, Projected date 2005
Cognate in curriculum
Dissertation topic: Conflict resolution

James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia
M. ED. Early Childhood Special Education, May 1989

B.A. English, May 1985

AWARDS AND ACTIVITIES

- Volunteer in local food pantry.
- Volunteer Sunday School Teacher in multicultural church
- Teacher of English as a Second Language in multicultural churches
- Candidate for Macy McClaugherty School's Teacher of the Year
- Delegate to the Virginia Education Association's Convention
- Volunteer for ARC of Northern Virginia
- Member of the Council of Exceptional Children
- Member of the American Federation of Teachers
- Profiled in Marquette's Who's Who in American Women 2000 Edition