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Parents' perceptions of school multidisciplinary team meetings and collaboration

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Parents' Perceptions of School Multidisciplinary Team Meetings and Collaboration

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Abstract

Multidisciplinary teams in schools often include both school-based staff and parents. Legislation requires schools to make decisions regarding educational planning and special education that include parents. Parent involvement in education has a positive impact on student achievement. Fostering parent involvement through collaborative teaming is critical in creating effective home-school relationships. This study explored a qualitative look at the perceptions of participants' experiences during meetings. Individual parent interviews were conducted after parents participated in a school-based team meeting (either a Student Based Referral Team meeting or an eligibility team meeting). Interview questions included questions regarding meeting context and organization, relationship factors, communication factors, problem-solving factors, and parent emotional factors. Results indicate parents report positive experiences with multidisciplinary teams, though there are many parental emotional factors that that can contribute to the effectiveness of multidisciplinary teams.

Parent Perceptions of School Multidisciplinary Team Meetings and Collaboration

The present study is an extension of a previous master's thesis project completed by Stephanie Torkelson. In her study, Torkelson (n.d.) explored the practices and prevalence of schools utilizing Response to Intervention (RTI) in their systems by surveying school psychologists. School psychologists' perceptions of their teams' processing skills were also explored. Torkelson (year) found that school psychologists perceived the overall functioning of their teams to be somewhat effective, and the most effective at addressing academic concerns and respecting members' opinions and feelings. Additionally, school psychologists perceived their teams to be the least effective at evaluating intervention outcomes and modifying interventions. Given the information provided from Torkelson (year), the present study will expand Torkelson's research by seeking the perceptions of parents as members of school based teams.

Review of Literature

Under the current reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004) and legislation such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001) school personnel are required to focus on supporting the academic progress of all students through research-based instruction. This offers an opportunity for educators to support children who struggle with academic performance, behavior and/or social expectations within the general education environment. One way to utilize this service is through the use of school-based, multidisciplinary problem-solving teams consisting of parents, teachers, and other school professionals. Unlike traditional models that focus on diagnosis and special education placement, problem-solving teams focus on intervention planning with a goal of maintaining children in the general education classroom. This

emphasis in the legislation has influenced systems' shift toward collaborative teaming in the schools. As the implementation levels of collaborative teaming continue to increase (Spectrum K12 Solutions, 2010), so must our understanding of the process of multidisciplinary teams.

This team approach to problem solving is not a new concept. When P.L. 94-142 was signed in 1975, multidisciplinary teams were mandated as the decision making body for special education determination (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975). In addition to multidisciplinary team decisions in special education, many states have required team consultation as part of the pre-referral process since the late 1980s (Carter & Sugai, 1989). Though they have used many names (pre-referral teams, student assistance teams, building assistance teams, teacher assistance teams, etc.), the team focus has been the design of interventions to help children be successful in the general education curriculum (Iverson, 2002). An essential aspect of these school-based teams is the involvement of parents as team members. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004) requires schools to include parents on any team whose purpose is to make decisions regarding children's education and possible special education services. Legislation such as IDEA (2004) requires parents to be major contributors to the special education process. Without parent participation and advocacy, the implementation of IDEA in schools might be less consistent or comprehensive (Turnbull, 2005). With that in mind, one should consider the assumptions about parents' knowledge and skills with regard to special education and advocacy (Kalyanpu, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000). IDEA (2004) contains the framework for parents to participate in special education as equal partners with school teams, though this partnership requires economic,

social, and cultural capital to garner this statues and power (Trainor, 2010). Though a difference in power status may inadvertently become present between parents and existing school teams, the importance of parent participation should be emphasized. A meta-analysis of the effects of parent involvement on student achievement in urban settings indicated a correlation between increased parent involvement and increased student achievement or growth (Jeynes, 2007). Not only are parents required to be invited to participate, their participation and involvement can impact student achievement.

Home-School Collaboration

Parent involvement in their child's education is associated with enhanced academic, social, and emotional outcomes for children (Christenson & Reschly, 2012; Minke & Anderson, 2005). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) asserts that collaboration between the home and school should involve both parents and school personnel as "active, and equal partners who share responsibility for the learning and success of all students," (NASP, 2012, p. 1). NASP (2012) notes that incongruence between school personnel's and parents' expectations, goals, and communication patterns may undermine the collaboration process and student outcomes. It is the responsibility of the school to provide a positive and welcoming environment for all families to engage in positive interactions (NASP, 2012). Creating and maintaining positive collaborations with parents in regard to the education of their children is vital to children's success in school. With that in mind, how parents perceive their experiences collaborating with multidisciplinary teams may affect a parent's role in future collaborations with the school.

Esquivel, Ryan, and Bonner (2008) explored involved parent perceptions of positive and negative experiences with multidisciplinary teams. These parents had extensive experience in school-based teams and were members of the district special education advisory committee. Seventeen current and past parent members who had children receiving special education services completed surveys and/or participated in a discussion of the findings and to clarify the data. The initial survey involved an open-ended prompt for parents to think about their positive experience as parent participants in school meetings. In addition, the researchers provided points for parents to consider, such as: what happened during the meeting; the context of the meeting; who was involved; how the parent reacted at the time; how the parent now feels about the experience; what about the experience made it positive; and how the experience affected the parent. Esquivel et al. (2008) found that the parent surveys indicated five thematic categories including the meeting context and organization, relationship factors, communication factors, problem-solving factors, and parent emotional factors. Responses in regard to meeting context and organization revealed that smaller, more informal meetings tended to enhance parent participation, whereas larger, more formal meetings tended to inhibit parent participation. Parent survey responses also indicated that *how* school personnel communicated their knowledge about important interventions for their students was important. Based on survey responses Esquivel et al. (2008) also revealed that parents felt it was important for school personnel to acknowledge parents' contributions to the meeting outcome. In addition, responses indicated that parents appreciate evidence that school personnel are taking responsibility for children's educational outcomes. Parents also felt that when disagreements exist, it is best for school personnel to provide honest

recognition of the disagreement to help maintain parents' participation. The researchers found that parents experience a range of emotions even for meeting with positive expectations and outcomes. Parents described feeling emotionally vulnerable when a team meeting is focused on problem behaviors or they receive news of their child's limited progress. Responses indicated that the more complex the needs of the child, the more difficult meetings can be for parents. Esquivel et al. (2008) assert that parents' emotions, whether positive or negative, may need to be acknowledged during team meetings.

Weiss, Dirks, Friedman, Hanley, Kreider, Levine, Mayer, McAllister, Vaughan, and Wellenkamp (1998) also highlighted parent perceptions of collaborative school meetings. The researchers used data from the MacArthur Comprehensive Child Development Project (CCDP) Follow-up Study which aimed to expand the understanding of the developmental trajectories of children through the elementary school years. The study followed approximately 400 children from kindergarten through the third grade. Of this sample, the researchers selected 23 children for ethnographic case studies, which later lead to a focus on three case vignettes of children in the second grade (Weiss, et al., 1998). These vignettes highlighted a different aspect of home-school collaboration, primarily from the perspective of these children's parents. The researchers focused on three different scenarios: a parent-teacher conference, a school-based team meeting, and an informal conversation between a parent and a teacher. In addition to the case studies, researchers also used quantitative data obtained from the MacArthur CCDP study. From the parent-teacher conference, the researchers noted that a lack of invitingness, sensitivity, and helpfulness on the part of the teacher undermined the opportunity for

communication that would have supported the students learning. Weiss et al. (1998) states that schools sometimes neglect to involve parents in the process of addressing students' problems at school, suggesting a disconnect in communication between the schools and the parents. The researchers explored the parent's perception of the meaning of the school-based meeting, and found that the parent never understood the purpose of the meeting. In addition, the researchers also noted that the parent felt as though she was at a board meeting being examined as a failed parent. The informal conversation revolved around the problem behavior of an African American student who moved out of a housing development into a mostly working class, white neighborhood. After the student moved into the new neighborhood, he began to act out in the classroom. This resulted in informal collaborations between the teacher and the mother. The findings from the informal conversation between the teacher and the parent indicated that even when parents and teachers work collaboratively, issues of race and class remain hidden and unexpressed (Weiss et al, 1998).

Similarly, Trainor (2010) explored social and cultural factors that impact parent approaches to advocacy during home-school collaborations regarding special education. In this study, the researcher conducted focus groups and individual interviews with parents whose children received special education services in order to gain an understanding of the resources parents use for the purpose of advocacy (Trainor, 2010). Parents' socioeconomic backgrounds were identified through eligibility for free and reduced cost lunch. Latino participants in this study were Spanish-language dominant and interviews were conducted in the presence of a native-Spanish speaking translator. Thirty three adults from 27 families participated in the study. The researcher divided the

participants into five focus groups with similar racial or ethnic backgrounds. Trainor (2010) asked questions regarding whom parents go to when they need help resolving a disagreement with school personnel, what type of services parents felt were most beneficial for their child, and where parents get information or help regarding school matters. After the focus groups, individual interviews were conducted with the participants and their families (Trainor, 2010).

Trainor (2010) found that all parents relied heavily on intuitive knowledge of their children when interacting with educators. Parents who were not eligible for free and reduced cost lunch were more likely to attend an IEP meeting with several ideas or requests or become involved in a support group that connects with other parents who are knowledgeable regarding the special education process (Trainor, 2010). Parents who were eligible for free and reduced cost lunch used this intuitive approach to advocacy more than their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Trainor, 2010). It was more common that parents eligible for free and reduced cost lunch had limited access to complex information about disability or special education, therefore they relied on their knowledge specific to their children (Trainor, 2010). Trainor (2010) noted that this type of intuitive advocacy often resulted in teachers disregarding this type of information and frustration on the part of the parents. The researcher also found that parents of color communicated uncertainty about the usefulness of disability characterizations and label (Trainor, 2010). Trainor (2010) also noted that parents of youth with autism shared common advocacy approaches that resulted to their desired outcomes of home-school collaborations. In contrast, parents of youth with emotional or behavioral disabilities were more likely to illustrate disconnect between home and school (Trainor, 2010). These

parents were more likely to discuss advocacy efforts that were thwarted by teachers'

responses to behavior problems at school.

School-Based Problem Solving Teams

In order to encourage and foster parent involvement in special education, school-

based, problems solving teams must operate effectively. Although necessary research has

supported the theoretical construct and efficacy of problem solving teams in well

controlled settings (Burns & Symington, 2002; Burns, Vanderwood, & Ruby, 2005;

Ruby, Crosby-Cooper, & Vanderwood, 2011), little evidence exists supporting the

effectiveness of these teams in practice (Burns et al., 2005; Ruby et al., 2011). A large

majority of states require team practices, but few actually provide systematic instruction

about how problem-solving teams are implemented (Truscott, Cohen, Sams, Sanborn, &

Frank, 2005). Research in training multidisciplinary teams has focused on university

training models (McNamara, Rasheed, & Delamatre, 2008; Ruby et al., 2011; Telzrow,

McNamara, & Hollinger, 2000) rather than field-based models of training.

Few, if any, of these training models include teaching skills specifically related to

the communication between school personnel team members and parents. School

personnel often and consistently function as a team, whereas parents are only involved

when the team is discussing their child. This could have the potential to affect the parent

perception of a team meeting. An analysis of the current research examining parent

involvement in team meetings indicates that parents are generally satisfied with team

meetings, although their participation in these meetings is low (Esquivel, Ryan, &

Bonner, 2008). In addition, Jones and Gansle (2010) explored the impact of

socioeconomic status and level of education on parental participation in meetings. The

researchers found that although there were observed differences in parent participation in

meetings, parents rated their overall comfort and participation in meeting as the same,

regardless of socioeconomic status and education level (Jones & Gansle, 2010). While

stakeholders such as parents and school personnel rate multidisciplinary teams favorably,

there is little evidence of the beneficial impact these teams have on student outcomes

(McNamara et al., 2008; Telzrow et al., 2000) or the impact team meetings have on

future collaboration.

Collaborative Teaming

The term "collaborative teaming" was described by Knackendoffel, Robinson,

Deshler, and Schumaker (1992) as an ongoing process in which school based personnel

with differing areas of expertise voluntarily work together to create solutions to problems

that are impeding students' success, as well as to carefully monitor and refine those

solutions. Though parents are explicitly stated as team members, the "collaborative

teaming" definition can be applied to them as team members with an area of expertise in

their knowledge of their child. In order for teams to have productive and effective

collaboration, mutual trust, respect, and open communication must be established

(Knackendoffel, 2007). Because collaborative teaming means that different people from

varying educational backgrounds have working relationships, the possibilities for ways of

teaming are endless.

Though collaborative teaming can happen many different ways, Friend and Cook

(1992) first developed defining characteristics of collaboration. First, they established

that collaboration is a voluntary process; although administration can require certain team

members to participate, only the team can decide if their interactions will be truly

collaborative. The researchers also established that collaboration requires equality among participants (Friend & Cook, 1992). Often, a difference exists between the power and capital of parents and that of the school team (Trainor, 2010), but for collaborative teaming, there cannot be a power struggle amongst individual team members (Friend & Cook, 1992). If one team member is perceived by others as having more knowledge or power, collaboration cannot occur (Friend & Cook, 1992). Likewise, Sulkowski, Wingfield, Jones, and Coulter (2011) found that interdisciplinary collaboration must establish a nonhierarchical working relationship. Collaboration should be based on mutual goals. Team members should establish at least one specific goal that maintains their shared attention rather than one person's agenda (Friend & Cook, 1992; Sulkowski et. al, 2011). Friend and Cook (1992) also pointed out that collaboration depends on mutual responsibility for participation and decision making. Shared responsibility in the case of collaborative teaming involves a convenient division of tasks rather than an equal one. Collaborative teaming involves individuals who share their resources such as time, knowledge, and access to other individuals or agencies (Friend & Cook, 1992; Sulkowski et. al, 2011). The final defining characteristic of collaborative teaming is team members share accountability for outcomes (Friend & Cook 1992). These defining characteristics can assist team members in proceeding beyond the legal obligation for multidisciplinary collaboration and instead focused on providing a mutually beneficial relationship that will support students' needs. Since the 1990's, there has been little focus on the specific characteristics of collaborative teaming in the literature and how school based teams can involve parents in the collaborative teaming process. Because the needs of both students

and multidisciplinary teams have evolved over the past 25 years, there may be a need for more research reexamining the area of defining characteristics in the future.

In addition to the defining characteristics of collaborative teaming, all team members should be aware of their readiness to participate in such teaming. Based on her previous works and a review of the literature, Knackendoffel (2007) states that the biggest barrier to collaboration is attempting to force collaboration between unwilling parties. Assessing where team members are on the "relationship continuum" (Knackendoffel, 2007, p. 3) can help establish realistic goals for collaboration. Knackendoffel (2007) goes on to define types of people that cause obstacles in working relationships. The first type of team member may ask for help or assistance, but does not follow through with that advice (Knackendoffel, 2007). It is important for the collaboration process to determine why this person will not accept suggested solutions. Once this reason is established, the task is to develop strategies that will remove the barrier to collaboration (Knackendoffel, 2007). The second type of team member is open to discussing problems when they are brought up but seems unwilling to participate in finding solutions. Once again the strategy is to identify the underlying barrier that is causing the lack of participation in suggesting solutions. Some individual team members are willing to work together, but they will not initiate the request for team assistance. Knackendoffel (2007) identified a likely reason for this is a lack of skill to help recognize and identify problems suitable for collaboration. It is important to ensure that this person is encouraged by being asked to work with other staff members (Knacendoffel, 2007). Establishing team members' readiness to collaborate is an essential part of the collaborative teaming process (Knackendoffel, 2007). Though the researcher focused on

school based teams in her review of literature, it is equally important to consider barrier to collaboration when working with parents as team members.

Along with being ready to collaborate, multidisciplinary team members must have the skills to engage in collaboration. Slater (2004) followed a qualitative focus group research design in order to evaluate the understanding of collaboration held by multidisciplinary team members. The team members included parents, teachers, and administrators in 14 elementary schools in a large public school system that had experience collaborating through a school improvement initiative which provided them with collaborative training. Consistent with Friend and Cook (1992), the focus group identified that a key factor in collaboration is individuals must volunteer to participate. Collaboration that was not voluntary resulted in participants expressing feelings of frustration, uselessness, and disappointment (Slater, 2004). The focus groups also identified having a common goal as a key factor in forming collaborative relationships. A common goal unites the team members and enables them to achieve positive outcomes. The absence of a common goal during collaboration tended to result in participants reporting inauthentic collaboration and superficial outcomes. The focus groups also identified skills that are needed for team collaboration. They emphasized the need for good communication skills, decision making and problem solving skills, emotional skills, conflict management, and teambuilding. In addition, relationships prior to collaboration were emphasized as a need in conjunction with developing skills (Slater, 2004). A strong relationship among team members can have a significant impact on creating an environment for collaborative teaming. The outcomes of this study also revealed several important elements that characterize the collaborative teaming process. Those factors

include trust, respect, and effective interpersonal communication (Slater, 2004) which are

similar to the characteristics of collaboration outlined by Knackendoffel (2007). The

nature of collaboration can be complex, but positive collaborative experiences that are

guided by specific skills may lead to a new understanding of the collaboration process

within different contexts.

Communication patterns during collaborative team meetings have been

emphasized in the literature (Friend & Cook, 1992; Knackendoffel, 2007; Slater, 2004).

Bennett, Erchul, Young, and Bartel (2012) examined relational communication patterns

in prereferral intervention team meetings, specifically the understanding of control

differences between team members. Relational patterns of domineeringness and

dominance of referring teachers, school psychologists, and specialists were operationally

defined. Domineeringness was defined as "the number of one-up messages spoken by

one person without regard to the second speaker's responses to them," (Bennett et al.,

2012, p. 189). This characteristic is embodied by an individual's attempted influence or

directiveness. Dominance, on the other hand, was operationally defined as "the

proportion that a speaker's one-up messages are responded to by one-down messages by

the other speaker," (Bennett et al., 2012, p. 189). Dominance is characterized by how

often an individual's attempts to control the conversation are accepted by another group

member. The researchers collected data from 15 initial prereferral intervention team

meetings from two schools. Each meeting was audiotaped, transcribed and coded using

the Family Relational Communication Control Coding System (FRCCCS). The FRCCCS

was utilized to better understand the instances of domineeringness and dominance within

the group context. The researchers found that with the exception of referring teachers,

dominance and domineeringness were somewhat similar across roles. This finding indicates that there was some shared directiveness and influence within the group. Referring teachers tended to have fewer instances of domineeringness than other group members, though their instances of dominance were similar to those of other professionals. This finding suggests that group members attempted to make teachers feel heard within group meetings (Bennett et al., 2012). Though this finding suggests that team behaviors help to engage referring teachers, the methodology in the Bennett et al. (2012) study may have influenced this finding. Though this study focused on the school-based members of the prereferral team, multidisciplinary teams should consider how domineeringness and dominance may impact collaborative teaming with parents.

In contrast to the Bennett et al. (2012) study, Slonski-Fowler and Truscott (2004) conducted interviews and observations of 12 kindergarten through fourth-grade teachers through the process of prereferral intervention. The researchers used a longitudinal qualitative-ethnographic research design. They collected data through semi-structured individual interviews, observations of prereferral intervention team meetings, and classroom observations. The researchers sought to understand the teachers' perceptions of the team process, meetings, and recommendations in addition to how those perceptions might have affected the teachers' participation in the process. From the teacher interviews, Slonski-Fowler and Truscott (2004) identified themes from the teachers' perspectives. The first theme was that prereferral intervention strategies were limited and vague which lead to teacher frustration when implementing interventions. The second theme was that the teams displayed very little accountability for the intervention implementation outcomes. From meeting observations, the researchers concluded that no

team members had checked back with teachers or observed teachers implementing the

recommended interventions. A third theme the interviews identified was teachers felt

their input was devalued or ignored by the teams (Slonski-Fowler, 2004). This finding is

inconsistent with the Bennett et al. (2012) finding that suggested teachers experienced

dominance in meetings that made them feel heard by their team members. Slonski-

Fowler and Truscott (2004) found that the perception of being devalued was linked to

team members' disregard for or negation of the teachers' input during prereferral team

meetings.

Once again, there seems to be a gap in the literature between what is outlined as

good collaborative practices and the perceptions of team members during collaboration.

Trust, respect, and effective communication are essential components to effective

collaboration (Friend & Cook, 1992; Knackendoffel, 2007; Slater, 2004), but as Slonski-

Fowler and Truscott's (2004) research demonstrated, when those basic elements are

absent, team members perceptions and attitudes toward collaboration are significantly

impacted. Though the research on collaborative teaming does not explicitly provide

examples of parents as team members or explore parent perceptions of collaboration, the

same principles of collaborative teaming should be applied to parent team members.

National and State Legislation

The current reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Improvement Act in 2004 promotes collaboration between general educators, special

educators and related services personnel as well as parents, principals, administrators and

other school staff (IDEA, 2004). In addition, IDEA 2004 requires a measure of the

teamwork that takes place as part of the initial evaluation (Hernandez, 2013). This piece

of the special education legislation has helped to shape multidisciplinary collaboration when working with students with disabilities. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 states schools are required to provide comprehensive services that are otherwise unavailable to children through a collaborative partnership with local providers (NCLB, 2001). This offers schools an opportunity to build collaborative relationships with local agencies that provide services to children, youth, and families. NCLB also mandates the development of a multidisciplinary, school support team composed of teachers, principals, pupil services, and parents. Through NCLB mandates, collaborative teaming plays an integral role in promoting individual student's progress in addition to school-wide improvement.

The Virginia Department of Education (2010) defines collaboration as "interaction among professionals as they work toward a common goal" (Virginia DOE, 8VAC20-81-10). It goes on to expand the definition beyond that of just co-teaching for teachers, which can be interpreted to involve many disciplines in the school. In Virginia, each school is required to have a team to make recommendations for a student's educational and behavioral needs when that student is referred for special education (Virginia Department of Education, 2010). In contrast to the national legislation (IDEA, 2004; NCLB, 2001), parent involvement in the team that makes recommendations for student's educational and behavioral needs is not emphasized. The team must include the referring source (which may or may not be the parent), the principal, at least one teacher, and at least one specialist. Other members may be included, based on the individual school division's policies, but the inclusion of parents as team members is not stated explicitly, unless they are the referral source. In addition, it is the responsibility of local

school divisions to establish problem solving teams in schools, though Virginia

legislation does not require the teams to include parents in referral teams (unless the

parent is the referral source) or to implement research-based intervention strategies.

Present Study

This study took place in a small urban school district in Southwest Virginia. This

district consists of 24 schools: 17 elementary schools, five middle schools, and two high

schools. The district serves a diverse population of approximately 13,700 students and

employs over 1,000 teachers. At the time of the present study, this district was served by

seven full time school psychologists, two part-time school psychologists, and one school

psychology intern. The psychologists served on two multidisciplinary teams. The first

was a Student Based Referral Team (SBRT) that is typically chaired by a regular

education teacher or an assistant principal. Members of this team often included the

SBRT chair, the classroom teacher, the parent, an administrator, the school psychologist,

and the school social worker. Speech pathologists, English Language Learning

specialists, reading specialists, and special education teachers were occasionally included.

The second multidisciplinary team that psychologists participated in is the eligibility

team. This team was chaired by the school psychologists and typically included the same

members as the SBRT team, such as the parent, the classroom teacher, an administrator,

the school social worker, a special education teacher, and occasionally a reading

specialist and/or a special education coordinator. This study primarily focused on

parents' perceptions of SBRT and eligibility team meetings.

There were four distinct purposes to the present study. These purposes included

determining: (1) parents' understanding of the meeting's purpose prior to the meeting; (2)

the perceptions of parents during and after the meeting; (3) parents' understanding of the meeting's purpose after the meeting; (4) what parents value in a school based meeting experience.

<div align="center">Method</div>

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of parents or legal guardians (grandparents or adoptive parents) who participated in multidisciplinary, school-based meetings. The researcher contacted parents or legal guardians who were scheduled to participate in multidisciplinary team meetings by phone in order to request consent to attend the meeting. After the researcher requested consent to attend the meeting, she obtained written consent to participate in the study from the parents or legal guardians prior to the meeting. Individual interviews with parents or legal guardians took place after the meeting. The meetings took place at eight different schools, with six different psychologists; each meeting concerned teams that consisted of different multidisciplinary team members. Of the 15 parents or legal guardians who were contacted, 13 parents signed permission forms to participate. Two of the 13 parents or legal guardians who signed permission to participate opted to stop the interview after the first question; the interview was immediately stopped and the recording was deleted. The researcher observed this meeting to be contentious between the parents and the school. Eleven of the 13 parents or legal guardians who signed permission forms chose to continue with interview; two of the participating parents answered the interview questions together concerning their child, resulting in a 66.67% participation rate. Of the 11 participants, three were legal guardians of the students; one was the grandfather of the student, and

two were adoptive mothers. One of the participants was a native Spanish speaker, and she

signed permission to participate with an interpreter. Six of the students whom the

meetings concerned were boys; four of the students were girls.

Parent Interview Questions

The parent interview consisted of four sections with ten open-ended questions.

Interview questions were developed based on a review of literature utilizing qualitative

ethnographic interview methods (Chenail, 2001) and were adapted from the Esquivel et.

al (2008) survey study specifically for school-based team meetings. Parent surveys from

the Esquivel et. al (2008) study found five categories (meeting context and organization,

relationship factors, communication factors, problem-solving factors, and parent

emotional factors) that emerged from themes in their research. Questions in the present

interview focused on parents' perceptions of the meeting context, relationship factors,

and parent emotional factors during the team meeting. The questions included in the

interview were newly developed based on important information found in the literature

review. Interview questions provided information corresponding to the four purposes of

this study (Semi-Structured Parent Interview Questions, see Appendix A). The interview

began with a script thanking the parents for agreeing to participate in the study, and

asking the parents what the meeting experience was like for them. The interview ended

with an open ended question asking the parents if they would like to add any more

information to the study. Meeting context interview questions included asking parents

about their prior knowledge of the context and purpose of the meeting, helpful

information they received prior to the meeting, and types of conversations the parents had

with school personnel prior to the meeting. Relationship factor questions included

parents' experience with school personnel during the meeting and their perceptions of the team members' relationships. Parent emotional factor questions included what parents liked about the meeting, what they didn't like about the meeting, and any advice parents would give to the team before meeting with another parent. An additional question came up during the course of the interviews which asked the parent what advice they would give to other parents who were about to participate in a multidisciplinary team meeting like the one they had just experienced.

Procedure

Informed consent was obtained from parents prior to the interview (Informed Consent, see Appendix B). The researcher conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with parent participants. Parent interviews took between five and 15 minutes to complete. Interviews were audio-recorded for clarification and accuracy of responses. After the completion of the analysis, audio responses were destroyed. No identifying information was collected or reported. The interviews and surveys took place after one School Based Referral Team (SBRT) meeting and nine Eligibility Team meetings. Teams consisted of similar team members including a psychologist, a parent, a school social worker, a classroom teacher, an administrator, and another specialist (e.g. speech language pathologist, reading specialist, special education teacher).

Analysis

After interviews were completed, they were transcribed into a word document, and then organized by the categories outlined above (opening question, context, relationship factors, and parent emotional factors). Any identifying information that came up during the semi-structured interviews, was not transcribed. Instead, names of students

were replaced with "my child," or "my student." Parents' responses to the interview

questions were analyzed using the cut and sort technique outlined by Ryan and Bernard

(2003). This research design emphasizes the importance of discovering themes in

qualitative research. Ryan and Bernard (2003) defines themes as useful ideas with subtle

differences. Esquivel et. al (2008) found themes from parents' survey responses (meeting

context and organization, relationship factors, communication factors, problem-solving

factors, and parent emotional factors) that were used as the basis for the present study's

interview questions. Therefore, this research identified themes using both an a priori

approach and an inductive approach (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). The researcher looked

for repetitions and similarities and differences between parent responses within the

responses to each question and within each category. After identifying repetitions, and

similarities and differences, the data were sorted into similar quotes. From the sorting of

the data, themes emerged and were identified.

<center>Results</center>

Recall that 11 parents participated in this study, and two of the parents

participated together after one meeting concerning their child. Therefore, 10 total

responses were recorded (Parent Interview Responses, Appendix C). All parents

described meetings in which their child's needs were discussed (School Based Referral

Team meetings and Eligibility Team meetings). One out of the 10 responses referred to a

SBRT meeting, the remaining nine responses referring to eligibility team meetings.

Parents' descriptions of these meetings are reported in the remainder of this section;

numbers in the parentheses following each quote indicate which of the ten parents

provided the response.

General Impressions

Eight of the participants responded positively about the overall process. For example, one participant said, "The process was good. Participants stayed on point. Objectives were clearly stated at the beginning. For the majority of time, discussion stayed on topic," (1). Though most participants reported feeling good about the meeting overall, five of the participants mentioned feeling stressed, overwhelmed, and scared in addition. For example, one participant noted that the process was "very overwhelming and emotional at times. I was very concerned about my child and her needs and I was worried they weren't going to be met," (9). Another participant said that "it was another weight on my shoulders, but it was worth it," (3). Four of participants commented that they enjoyed hearing what the school team had to say about their child. One participant noted that they appreciated the team "being able to explain everything and taking time out to be able to test my student," (4). Another participant after commenting how good it was to hear what different people had to say about her child, noted that parts of the meeting were hard to understand at first. For example, this participant said that the team "used a few abbreviations here or there and I wasn't sure what they were talking about, but I kind of gathered what it was after a while," (6).

{In another example, one participant said, "The process was good. Participants stayed on point. Objectives were clearly stated at the beginning. For the majority of time, discussion stayed on topic," (1). Though most participants reported feeling good about the meeting overall, five mentioned feeling stressed, overwhelmed, and scared in addition. For example, one participant noted that the process was "very overwhelming and emotional at times. I was very concerned about my child and her needs and I was

worried they weren't going to be met," (9). Four of the participants commented that they enjoyed hearing what the school team had to say about their child. One participant noted that they appreciated the team "being able to explain everything and taking time out to be able to test my student," (4).}

Meeting Context

Participants' knowledge of the meeting context prior to the meeting generally revolved around their understanding of how their child was performing compared to other students. When they were asked to say what they knew prior to the meeting, six of the participants talked about what they knew of their child's educational or behavioral needs. Five of the participants responded that they knew something about testing prior to the meeting, and three of the participants mentioned they didn't know what was going to be discussed. For example, one participant commented, "I didn't know that this was the process she had to go through, but I knew my child was hyperactive and impulsive," (5).

Two participants mentioned that receiving reports prior to the meeting was helpful, and two participants mentioned that it would have been helpful, but they did not receive the papers in the mail. One participant noted with a sense of humor, "that's USPS for you," (2). The remaining six participants reported that they did not think receiving or knowing anything prior to the meeting could have been helpful.

Participants' reports of conversations with school staff prior to the meeting tended to vary. Three participants mentioned a prior meeting where they met staff, three participants mentioned talking on the phone with the student's teacher prior to the meeting, and two participants mentioned contacting the school themselves. Some other conversations prior to the meeting that the participants reported were with the school

psychologist, the school social worker, the case manager, and the speech pathologist. Of the ten interviews, one participant reported having negative interactions and conversations with school staff prior to the meeting. This participant indicated that he was recently rewarded custody of his child after some unfounded investigations conducted by social services. This participant felt he needed to be honest with the school, but that he didn't feel like the school trusted him as a participant. In reference to this situation, this participant commented, "That really made me mad, but I got over it," (10).

Relationship Factors

Eight participants reported experiencing a positive relationship with the school staff. Four participants also noted that they felt like the school staff was very genuine in understanding their child's needs. For example, one participant commented, "Everyone has my child's best interest at heart," (2). Another participant said, "I felt a clear sense that they were really trying to help. They knew he needed help, and they wanted to make sure he got it," (6). Three participants mentioned that they felt that the school staff was clear and informative. Though majority of the participants reported experiencing a positive relationship with school staff, one participant commented that what the staff talked about "bother me a little bit because some of the stuff they talked about was hurtful even though he's making progress. It was hurtful to hear about his cognitive skills," (10).

In all ten interviews, the participants reported either that the school team worked well together or that they could sense that the school team had prior working relationships. One participant commented that she felt the school team worked well

together and that "they had discussed things before the meeting," (8). Other participants

commented that the school team was friendly, cooperative, professional, and harmonious.

Six participants reported that they enjoyed gaining new information and

knowledge about their child's educational needs through the meeting. One participant

commented that she liked that "everybody knew what was going on and that I [she] got

answers," (4). Another participant noted that she liked "getting a better understanding of

where my student is in comparison to others," (3). Four participants reported that they

appreciated that they liked that the meeting participants were concise that the meetings

were timely. For example, one participant commented that she appreciated that the

meeting was "to the point; these meetings are long enough as it is," (2).

Participant responses when asked what they did not like about the meeting were

generally short and favorable of the school teams. Nine participants said there was nothing

that they disliked about the meeting. One participant offered constructive criticism of the

team saying, "I think they only thing I had any discomfort about was not knowing how

much to say," (6).

Advice

Participants' advice for the school based team in the future was variable. Five of

the participants reported that they did not have any advice to give or that the team should

continue to function as they are with no changes. One participant noted that he was able

to understand diagnostic terminology because he has experience in the medical field,

however he was unsure of how a participant with limited educational, medical, or

psychological background would respond to the team's presentation (1). Another

participant commented that she would like for the "team to continue the process" (3) with

her child, though she knows not everyone at the table would be involved with her child's

day to day education. One participant commented that there is a lot of paperwork, and she

felt that "explaining what an IEP is and what you can expect" (4) would be helpful for the

team to continue to do in the future. Another participant commented that she wished that

the meeting venue were different, stating, "it's like a storage room, it's a little weird; the

meeting place did not match the context," (6). This participant noted that she understands

"that schools only have so much space, but still," (6).

When participants were asked if they would like to make any addition comments,

all participants responded that they did not have anything to add. Thus, an additional

question which was a variation of the previous question was asked to the participants;

what advice would they have for another participant going through the process? In

response to this question, five of the participants noted emotional factors that participants

are likely to feel such as anxiety, fear, and guilt. One participant commented "you should

know that with participants, you will find a lot of fear," (1). Another participant

commented that "it's hard to get everything done without feeling guilty or like I failed

my child in some way," (5). In addition, three of the participants said they would tell

other participants to be an advocate for their child. One participant would tell other

participants "you are your child's voice," (9). Another participant would say, "don't be

afraid to speak what is on your mind," (2) to other participants. Additionally, two

participants commented on the patience and perseverance that it takes to work with

children with disabilities (5 & 10), and two participants added that they would tell other

participants to remember to monitor their child's progress (7 & 8).

Discussion

As the use of multidisciplinary teams that include both school-based staff and parents continues to be prevalent in schools, the importance of researching participant perceptions of school teams is clear. The purpose of the present study was to provide a qualitative look at the perceptions of participants' experiences during meetings and to provide school personnel with information that can assist in creating environments of collaboration with participants. In the present study, participant responses were analyzed using the cut and sort technique (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) based on thematic factors that emerged from semi-structured participant interviews that were conducted after a multidisciplinary team meeting. The purpose of this type of design is to generate information about the experiences of participants in order to inform subsequent quantitative research.

Themes

The results of this study showed that though participants report a positive experience with multidisciplinary teams, there are many emotional factors that that can contribute to the effectiveness of multidisciplinary teams. Participants in the present study indicated feeling overwhelmed, stressed, anxious, terrified, guilty, and somewhat confused in their overall impressions of team meetings. Themes of emotional reactions continued to evolve when participants discussed advice they would give to other school-based teams and other participants. When participants were asked to give advice to other parent participating in the process, half of the participants' responses included an emotional comment. The most frequent emotional comment concerned guilt and fear. Some participants talked about their experience feeling guilty that they haven't done

enough for their children, while other participants talked about how they could imagine other parents might feel guilty or defensive. It is possible that these participants were projecting their emotional experience on to the future experiences of other participants. These emotional factors have the potential to impact the collaboration during meetings (Slater, 2004). This may be indicative of the vulnerabilities that participants face when confronted with the complex needs of their children (Esquivel et al., 2008). Ultimately, this highlights this importance of collaborative teams acquiring emotional skills as well as acknowledging participant emotional factors during team meetings (Esquivel et al., 2008; Slater, 2004). Because school psychologists have expertise in the areas of special education and psychology (Manz, Mautone, & Martin, 2009), the leadership role in acknowledging parent emotional factors during meetings may fall to them.

The results of this study also indicated that participants felt that teams understood their individual children's needs regardless of the level of contact with the school prior to the meeting. Majority of participants in this study felt that they had positive interactions with school staff and that the school staff was able to accurately describe their children. The amount of interactions participants had with school staff and the different school personnel that participants contacted did not appear to alter participants' reports of positive interactions. Similarly, Gimpel and Huebner (2008) found that two different samples of participants gave consistently high ratings of the role of the school psychologist. In addition, Jones and Gansale (2010) found that participants felt a high level of comfort and satisfaction when working with teams, regardless of contact with school staff prior to the meetings. Though participants in the present study indicated positive interactions with school personnel, it should be noted that only one participant

indicated that she contacted the school prior to the meeting. The participant indicated that she was worried, so she contacted the school. The other participants in the study either indicated that they were contacted by someone informing them of the meeting time, to give the participants updates on their students' progress, or the participants in the eligibility meetings indicated that they had not been contacted since the SBRT meeting. This implies that parents may not feel comfortable contacting the school in regards to meeting context. School teams should appoint one contact person that can inform the parent of the progress of evaluations, answer questions, and discuss student progress. In addition, teams should ensure that parents have an awareness of the meeting purpose and conclusions should be outlined in a concise and understandable way.

Prior knowledge is limited to participants being aware that some type of testing took place, but this did not appear to impact their overall positive experience. Participants indicated that they knew their children were having academic or behavioral difficulties in the classroom, and that some type of testing was taking place. Participants did not indicate an awareness of what type of testing or that the results of the testing were helpful prior to the meeting. The participants who indicated that they did receive reports in the mail did not appear to have more knowledge of the context of the meeting compared to the participants who did not receive reports before the meeting. This is similar to Gimpel and Huebner's (2008) finding that parents rated assessment as the least important function of a school psychologist. Though most participant responses indicated they knew very little of the meeting context, some participants who did not receive reports prior to the meeting indicated that receiving reports before the meeting would have been helpful. Though many parents commented that the meeting process involves a lot of

paperwork, it may be beneficial to create a one-page "cheat-sheet" that outlines the process for parents and what they can expect.

Impressions

Though participants did not indicate negative experiences when asked what they didn't like about the meeting, one participant commented that she felt discomfort about her level of participation. Overall, during the 10 meetings that the participants were interviewed about, the participants did not say much during the meetings. Esquivel et al. (2008) found that formal meetings with more than three participants hindered parent participation. In the present study, all of the meetings in which the participants were interviewed regarding, were formal meetings with at least six participants. The structure of the meetings allowed school team members to share their concerns or the results of an evaluation. Generally, when parents were invited to participate, it was after all school personnel had spoken, and parents responded saying they had nothing to add. It is important to acknowledge that participants felt that the school teams conveyed a knowledge of their children as unique individuals; according to Esquivel et al. (2008) avoiding defining students according to their disabilities helps to improve parent experiences. Though this may have contributed to parents overall positive experiences, little parent participation during a meeting may be reflected in the lack of parent engagement in school (Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003). School teams should encourage parents to actively participate in meetings. Involving parents in the pre-meeting planning (Esquivel et al., 2008) and reflecting parent emotional factors may be two ways to support active parent participation.

Because the researcher was an observer during meetings, she formed her own impressions of the team collaboration and overall experience. Generally, when the researcher observed meetings that incorporated a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of an individual student, the parents appeared to report that the like the information they gained from a meeting. Many teams were observed to state something positive about a student before discussing a student weakness. After discussing student weaknesses, the team members would end with another positive comment concerning the child. In addition, meetings typically took place between forty-five minutes to an hour. Parents reported that they felt meetings were concise and stayed on point overall.

Another participant commented that he has a medical background and that he is familiar with psychological jargon, but he could not imagine how a parent that lacks a significant educational background would understand the information presented during the meeting. Though no other participants commented that they did not understand the information presented in the meeting, the role participants' level of education and socioeconomic status should be considered when assessing barriers to participation (Jones & Gansle, 2010). School team members should check for understanding and avoid using specialized terminology, jargon, or technical language during meetings (Family Empowerment and Disability Council, 2012). Because it may be difficult to explain the process of special education or intervention planning without the use of technical language, school personnel should collaboratively develop a jargon-free explanation of the evaluation results and intervention planning.

Limitations

This study posed several limitations. First, the sample size was limited to a single school district in Virginia, making it difficult to generalize. Thus, the conclusions are limited and further research is needed to determine whether they generalize to other populations. Because this study is exploratory in nature, it is the hope of the researcher that the school district is able to use the results to inform future practices. Second, demographic information was not collected or analyzed and future research may wish to explore the impact of socioeconomic standing, ethnic and cultural characteristics, and geographic locations of participants. Another limitation of the present study is the type of multidisciplinary meetings that participants experienced. Collaboration between participants and school staff can happen in many different ways. Whether specific types of school-based team meetings may affect participant experiences and perceptions in different ways may be a topic for future research. The interview process itself may have also been a limitation in this study. The researcher was associated with the schools system, which could have created a power laden interview results in biased answers and responses in favor of the school district.

Implications and Recommendations

Partnerships between parents and educators require ongoing development and evaluation (NASP, 2012). Though results from the present study are difficult to generalize given the sample size, understanding parents' unique perspectives can help school-based teams plan for future collaboration. The following recommendations are for school-based team personnel to consider before and during eligibility meetings. Prior to Eligibility Meetings, school teams should appoint one team member as the liaison between the parents

and the school. The results of the present study indicate that parents are not likely to contact the school themselves. Becoming a contact person for the parents may help parents to feel more comfortable contacting the school with questions regarding eligibility. School teams should develop a way to provide parents with a clear and understandable explanation of the evaluation process. For example, teams should outline for parents what documents will be sent home, what to read before the meeting, what is required of them prior to the meeting, what questions they would like to be answered, etc. Multidisciplinary teams typically consist of team members who are experts in their perspective fields; as such they are more likely to use jargon that is specific to their particular field. Because parents that lack a professional background in educational or psychological terminology, teams should collaboratively predetermine language that would be appropriate for all team members to understand during a meeting. In addition, the results of the present study indicate that the special education process and eligibility meetings are emotional experiences for parents. School team members should be aware of and prepared to acknowledge the emotional journey of the parents.

In addition to implications for school teams, some implications for the role of school psychologists should also be noted. School psychologists have multifaceted roles that involve providing direct services, consultation, and education (Manz, Mautone, & Martin, 2009). As direct service providers, school psychologists have the responsibility of informing, engaging and creating meaningful roles for parents. As consultants, school psychologists have the responsibility of cultivating working relationships among teachers, administrators, specialists, and families. As educators, school psychologists provide training and guidance to teachers and administrators regarding family involvement and

collaboration. With ample expertise in the areas of consultation, collaboration, education, and psychology, school psychologists should acknowledge a leadership role when collaborating with teams and parents. Though school psychologists have ample training and knowledge of school collaborations and therefore could be utilized as school-based trainers, they are often prohibited from doing so due to time spent on special education determination (Burns & Symington, 2002; Manz, Mautone, & Martin, 2009). Given the ubiquitous nature of multidisciplinary teams that include parents, teachers, and other school personnel, it seems important to study teams in greater depth. The present study sought to gain understanding of parent experiences and perspectives during multidisciplinary meetings regarding special education planning. Results from this study should be used to inform future studies involving parent involvement and participation in school-based team meetings.

APPENDIX A
Semi-Structured Parent Interview Questions

Script: Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed today. I really appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to speak with me. I will be asking you some questions about the meeting you just experienced, but first, I would like to open it up to how was this meeting you just attended for you?

- **Context**

    o   Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting.

    o   What if anything could have been helpful to you to receive or know before the

        meeting?

    o   What kinds of conversations with school personnel did you have before the

        meeting?

- **Relationship**

    o   Please describe your experience with other people at the table.

    o   What did you notice about the relationships of team members with each other?

        With you?

- **Parent Emotional Factors**

    o   Tell me about what you liked about the meeting.

    o   Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting.

    o   If you had any advice for this team before they were to meet with another parent,

        what would you suggest?

- **Closure**

    o   Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

Parent Consent to Participate in Research

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Brittany R. Jones, M.A. under the supervision of Tammy Gilligan, Ph.D. from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of parent perceptions of school based team meetings. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of an Ed.S. thesis requirement for Ms. Jones and will provide information on the current perceptions of parents and how school personnel can develop effective school based teams that target potential barriers to the home-school collaborative process.

Research Procedures

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of an interview that will be administered to individual participants at school. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to your experience of a school based team meeting. Your responses will be audio recorded to help the researcher clarify your responses, and then later destroyed.

Time Required

Participation in this study will require approximately 20 minutes of your time.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life). The information you provide will help us understand what participating in a school based team meeting is like for you.

Benefits

The information collected from this study may not benefit you directly, but what is learned should be useful in informing the future practice of school based teams.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be presented at the University conference. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers including audio recordings will be destroyed.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Brittany Jones, M.A.   Tammy Gilligan, Ph.D.
Graduate Psychology   Graduate Psychology
James Madison University   James Madison University
jonesbr@dukes.jmu.edu   gilligtd@jmu.edu

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject
Dr. David Cockley
Chair, Institutional Review Board
James Madison University
(540) 568-2834
cocklede@jmu.edu

Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

☐ I give consent to be audio taped during my interview. _____ (initials)

_____
Name of Participant (Printed)

_____   _____
Name of Participant (Signed)   Date

_____   _____
Name of Researcher (Signed)   Date

APPENDIX C
Transcription of Interviews

Participant 1 (1)
Overall Impression: The process was good. Participants stayed on point. Objectives were clearly stated at the beginning. For the majority of time discussion stayed on topic.

- **Context**

    o Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting. **I knew that this was going to be an assessment of the child's development, and the psychologist's report. Decisions were to be made about how to identify child's disability. And that identification had long term implications because diagnosis drives benefits and drives actions and permissible actions, so this is consistent with what I was anticipating.**

    o Can you think of anything that could have been helpful before the meeting? **The psychologists' reports that confirmed diagnoses and clarified for me the aspects of the child's school life were attributing to the diagnosis and also enabled me to get an idea of what was proposed.**

    o What kinds of conversations did you have before the meeting? **They had an IEP meeting that included several staff members**

- **Relationship**

    o Please describe your experience with other people at the table. **Positive. Everyone had student's interests at heart. Thoughtful. Very clear about the positives and negatives about the student's social interactions and academic procedures.**

    o What did you notice about the relationship of the team members with each other? **Friendly. Cooperative. An awareness of everyone's role.** With you? **Friendly. I maintain written communication with the teacher.**

- **Parent Emotional Factors**

- o Tell me about what you liked about the meeting. **Stayed on point. Doesn't run on. People are aware of what they need to contribute, and they follow through. Don't get the feeling that anyone is territorial.**

- o Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting. **Very little.**

- o If you had a piece of advice for the team, what would you suggest? **I don't have much advice for the team. I've been involved in the student's care and I'm comfortable with diagnostic terminology, probably not close to the mean when it comes to how much a parent should know and how much a parent is expected to know. I have worked in the medical field as a doctor for more than 30 years. How do you talk to a parent with no educational/medical/psychological background? I have no clue.**

- **Closure**

  - o Is there anything else you would like to add? **I suppose that if I had some advice it would be to dumb it down, for lack of a better term. Also, I think you should know that with parents, you will find a lot of fear.**

Participant 2 (2)
Overall Impression: It was good. I've had other eligibility meetings before so it was right on with all the other ones.

- **Context**

    o Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting. **I knew that my child was having trouble in the classroom with comprehending what was being asked of him as well as with reading.**

    o What if anything could have been helpful to you to receive or know before the meeting? **If the reports had come in the mail to me before the meeting, it would have helped, but that's USPS for you! I could have looked them over and been more prepared.**

    o What kinds of conversations with school personnel did you have before the meeting? **The psychologist told me that she would be sending the surveys to me. The social worker did the home interview and we spent about an hour together going over our history. I've talked to the principal on the phone multiple times about his behavior, and I've talked to his teacher on the phone and in person about his school things. And the special ed woman, today was the first day I met her.**

- **Relationship**

    o Please describe your experience with other people at the table. **Everything has been real good and positive. Everyone has my child's best interest in mind.**

    o What did you notice about the relationships of team members with each other? **They work really well together. They've worked together in the past.** With you? **No Response.**

- **Parent Emotional Factors**

  o Tell me about what you liked about the meeting. **Everything was all business and to the point. These meetings are long enough as it is, so I appreciated that.**

  o Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting. **There wasn't anything.**

  o If you had any advice for this team before they were to meet with another parent, what would you suggest? **Honestly, I don't have any recommendations.**

- **Closure**

  o Is there anything else you would like to add? **It would be great if there wasn't so much paperwork. If I had any advice for a parent it would be: Don't be afraid to speak what is on your mind. If you want to see something happen, you have to ask. You have as much say as what goes in an IEP as they do.**

Participant 3 (3)
Overall Impression: It was another weight on my shoulders, but it was worth it because one day I won't be here forever, so they need all the help they can get.

- **Context**

    o Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting. **I guess all the observations and reports. I had a general idea. I thought my student would qualify for everything. I've been told that kids develop differently. I could see the difference in communication between my three year old and my one year old.**

    o What if anything could have been helpful to you to receive or know before the meeting? **I don't think there was anything. Everyone here has been excellent.**

    o What kinds of conversations with school personnel did you have before the meeting? **I kind of harassed everybody here. I was worried so I contacted people.**

- **Relationship**

    o Please describe your experience with other people at the table. **Absolutely positive. I have to work with social services on some things and they don't call back and I feel like they don't care, but everyone here stays in contact and really cares.**

    o What did you notice about the relationships of team members with each other? **I guess I can tell that they work together every day.** With you? **Everybody has been great.**

- **Parent Emotional Factors**

    o Tell me about what you liked about the meeting. **I liked getting a better understanding of where my student is in comparison to others.**

    o Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting. **Nothing.**

- o If you had any advice for this team before they were to meet with another parent, what would you suggest? **It would be nice for the team to continue the process with my student. I guess that's not their job, but it would be nice**

- **Closure**

  - o Is there anything else you would like to add? **I can't get over feeling guilty sometimes. I feel guilty about everything. I know that statistically kids who are raised in a single home have more problems and I feel guilty. To other parents I would say that you can't give up and you have to try to get things accomplished for the kids. I'm happy my student is going to get the help that he needs, but I'm anxious to see what happens next.**

Participant 4 (4)
It wasn't confusing. It was everybody being able to explain everything and taking the time out to be able to test my student. Everybody had their notes and they were able to explain everything, and help my student get what she needs

- **Context**

  o Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting. **The notes that were sent home with me, they were explaining everything I knew was going on with my student as far as how she struggles with homework and memory. Them being able to give the tests help me realize that it's not just me seeing these problems.**

  o What if anything could have been helpful to you to receive or know before the meeting? **Nothing I can think of.**

  o What kinds of conversations with school personnel did you have before the meeting? **The student's teacher had called after the last meeting and she called before this meeting just telling me what was going on and what was going to happen. She made sure I had what I needed.**

- **Relationship**

  o Please describe your experience with other people at the table. **Everybody was nice and everybody explained everything. Nobody was trying to look at their notes trying to remember what to say. It seemed like everybody knew everything that was going on with my student.**

  o What did you notice about the relationships of team members with each other? **Everybody was on the same page and had been communicating with each other. Everyone was on board with the next steps.** With you? **No Response**

- **Parent Emotional Factors**

  o Tell me about what you liked about the meeting. **I liked that it was a small group and that everybody knew what was going on and that I got answers.**

- o Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting. **Nothing I can think of. I knew why everybody here and that made me feel comfortable.**

- o If you had any advice for this team before they were to meet with another parent, what would you suggest? **There's a lot of paperwork. But having all the notes and explaining what was going on and what was the next step. Explaining what an IEP is and what you can expect. Last time they said expect a letter about a meeting, and now I feel like I have more information.**

- **Closure**

  - o Is there anything else you would like to add? **No, I think it went really good.**

Participant 5 (5)

Overall Impression: With everything that we already do it was kind of stressful, but I do want to make sure that my student gets the best possible treatment and the best possible care because I understand my student has a disorder and I don't want to just send my student to kindergarten and address the issues now. I feel like doing it this early we will see more changes in the future. It was stressful because I get off work and then rush to get my child and then rush to get to the school and then we leave here and rush to get to speech therapy and then that's the day. But I actually feel a lot better that we actually have this meeting done. It was a stressful process but it was worth it. I think it's probably stressful for the other people at the table too, but if they can take the time out of their busy schedule to help my child, it wouldn't kill me to move some things around to make sure my child gets some help.

- **Context**

  - Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting. **I didn't know that this was the process that she had to go through, but I knew that my child was hyperactive and impulsive. I wasn't expecting scores to be so low. I was expecting my child's scores to be more average by this time after being in speech for so long.**

  - What if anything could have been helpful to you to receive or know before the meeting? **Well nothing. For me the process itself was just stressful, but the information wasn't overwhelming. I knew something wasn't right. The test scores were the only thing that surprised me. But I kind of figured that because of the way they had to test her.**

  - What kinds of conversations with school personnel did you have before the meeting? **I spoke with the psychologist on the phone and she explained to me the process and that was before the meeting. In the first meeting I met with everyone and we talked and they explained to me what they were going to do and what was going to take place.**

- **Relationship**

  - Please describe your experience with other people at the table. **It was really good. Everyone was nice, informative, and patient with me. I felt very**

welcomed and a part of the team. We were able to get everything done in a

timely manner, so it was really good.

- o What did you notice about the relationships of team members with each other?

  Everybody works well together. They knew not to conflict with this persons'

  schedule. They knew how to do things in a timely manner. I have no

  complaints at all. I feel good about when my child will start here in the fall.

  With you? **No Response.**

- **Parent Emotional Factors**

  - o Tell me about what you liked about the meeting. **It was a normal meeting.**

    Nobody talked out of turn and nobody was disruptive. Even my child sat

    well through the meeting! I was able to get the info that I needed, and

    everybody was able to talk, and it was done in a timely manner.

  - o Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting. **Nothing. I mean**

    everything went so well, so it was smooth sailing. Everyone was able to talk

    and I was able to get the information I needed.

  - o If you had any advice for this team before they were to meet with another parent,

    what would you suggest? **Everything was well planned out and I had my**

    paperwork before I came here. I was able to ask my questions. Keep doing

    what they are doing!

- **Closure**

  - o Is there anything else you would like to add? **I would tell other single, working**

    parents, I would say make sure you have time. Make sure you set your

    schedule so you can get this done, because the faster you get it done the

    better. If you feel your child needs some extra attention in any area, address

    it. Don't make excuses when clearly there is something else going on with

    how they process information. My advice to any parent is if you see your

child is going through anything, address it. For me, it's hard to get everything done without feeling guilty or feeling like I failed her in some way. I couldn't help looking for the reason because I've never heard of this disorder before. I felt like, where did that come from? Did you just make that up? You just have to know that some things you just don't have any control over, but it's nice to know that she is going to get help. I was so terrified of sending my child to kindergarten because I thought the teachers wouldn't be patient with my child because it takes so much patience to work with her and I was anticipating a lot of frustration. Parents should know that it takes so much patience to work with children like this. I'm so so glad that I did this because now my child knows people here, I know people here. This is a very good process. It eased my mind.

Participant 6 (6)
Overall Impression: I think it was really good to hear what the different people had to say about my child. It was really good information and I appreciated it. Some of things like they used a few abbreviations here or there and I wasn't sure what they were talking about, but I kind of gathered what it was after a while

- **Context**

    - Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting. **I knew my child was being tested. I didn't know results of any of the tests or which direction it was going to go as far as getting my child services or not. I kind of, based on what I know about the child, I was pretty sure that something needed to happen.**

    - What if anything could have been helpful to you to receive or know before the meeting? **I know that the psychologist sent home a packet, but I didn't get it. That would have been helpful. Unfortunately it didn't get to me when it got home.**

    - What kinds of conversations with school personnel did you have before the meeting? **We had a meeting with everyone in this group before and we talked about a lot of concerns—their concerns and my concerns as well. I shared the history of what my student had been through. The only other contact was through the social worker getting interviewed. The most information that I get was from the student's day treatment counselor, and I'm surprised she wasn't here. With her I mostly discuss his behavior problems or how well he did. And I had spoken to his teacher a few times.**

- **Relationship**

    - Please describe your experience with other people at the table. **Everyone was very professional and understanding. I felt a clear sense that they were really trying to help. They knew he needed help, and they wanted to make sure he got it.**

- o What did you notice about the relationships of team members with each other? **I thought they were all very professional and very familiar with each other. It struck me that they all had very good working relationships. Harmonious. With you? No Response.**

- **Parent Emotional Factors**

  - o Tell me about what you liked about the meeting. **I like that my student is going to get help. I like the result. I appreciated the opportunity to hear what others were experiencing with him and what their interactions with him were like. Especially because there was a before meds and an after meds perspective. To know those things are helping and the extent to which they are helping that was good to hear.**

  - o Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting. **I think the only thing I had any discomfort about was not knowing how much to say. Whether to stay quiet or add in. I have a tendency to be very talkative, and I just don't know how much I should say or how much I shouldn't say in a situation like this.**

  - o If you had any advice for this team before they were to meet with another parent, what would you suggest? **Where we have to come to meet—it's like a storage room, it's a little weird. The meeting place doesn't match the context. It makes me feel like I'm being closeted away somewhere. Literally, this is a big closet. I understand that schools only have so much space, but still.**

- **Closure**

  - o Is there anything else you would like to add? **I would tell another parent to not be defensive, to be ready to do what you need to do for your kid. I'm a little different because I'm a guardian and I've only been with him for 6 months, so some of the things that may have caused some of his problems weren't my**

responsibility, so I don't have guilt for it. I have some guilt for not reacting the way a patient, loving parent would react sometimes, and getting upset with him sometimes. But I can't imagine going through this having been there during all of the trauma too. So I think that would raise a lot of defensiveness for a parent. I think that would be really hard. I think the group was very understanding and they know what I'm dealing with. There is one thing: someone came in part way through the meeting and I don't mind her coming in like that, but I think it would have been better for me if they had interrupted right away and said who this is because I was sitting there thinking, you're talking about private things and I don't know who this is! Everybody else knew it was okay, but not me. Overall, I think everyone was really helpful and I really appreciate everything everyone has done. And this is one step toward helping my student.

Participant 7 (7)

Overall Impression: Good. It wasn't anything new.

- **Context**
    - Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting. **Discussing the progress and the biggest thing she wanted to know was where he will go to school next year.**
    - What if anything could have been helpful to you to receive or know before the meeting? **Nothing.**
    - What kinds of conversations with school personnel did you have before the meeting? **His teacher told me that he is doing well that he is doing well that he is learning a lot of English. She had a similar meeting when he started at this school.**

- **Relationship**
    - Please describe your experience with other people at the table. **Good. I felt comfortable. She felt like she could speak if she wanted to**
    - What did you notice about the relationships of team members with each other? **They get along.** With you? **No Response.**

- **Parent Emotional Factors**
    - Tell me about what you liked about the meeting. **The news that she got that he is doing well, that they kept reinforcing what a good kid he was. They stayed positive.**
    - Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting. **Nothing.**
    - If you had any advice for this team before they were to meet with another parent, what would you suggest? **I don't know. Stay positive.**

- **Closure**
    - Is there anything else you would like to add? **I would tell other parents to listen and see how their progress is going.**

Participants 8 & 9 (8)
Overall Impression: Great. Hearing that he's doing so great. Overwhelming just to know that he has come such a long way.

- **Context**

    o Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting. **I already knew that they were going to be talking about not needing to have special education anymore. And I was just concerned about him going into middle school without any guards.**

    o What if anything could have been helpful to you to receive or know before the meeting? **The psychologist had sent some papers home. And it was helpful going over those papers. And we pretty much knew how much he has advanced since preschool.**

    o What kinds of conversations with school personnel did you have before the meeting? **None. To me it was a good thing because there was nothing bad going on. There wasn't anything that had to be said. The communication we have had has been positive and that's if I write a letter to the teacher to ask what has been going on!**

- **Relationship**

    o Please describe your experience with other people at the table. **It was a pleasant visit and discussion.**

    o What did you notice about the relationships of team members with each other? **That they work well together and that they were all on the same page. Evidently they had discussed things before the meeting and they knew what was going on.** With you? **No Response.**

- **Parent Emotional Factors**

    o Tell me about what you liked about the meeting. **That they said that he had made some big improvements and he doesn't need special education**

> **supports anymore. We pretty much proved the doctor wrong and that feels good.**

- o Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting. **I'm cool with it.**

- o If you had any advice for this team before they were to meet with another parent, what would you suggest? **They have it all under control.**

- **Closure**

  - o Is there anything else you would like to add? **For parents I would say keep up with the staff and your student and monitor the progress. I don't even know why I'm crying! I just think the testing that they do for the special ed kids, they do a great job and they show they care. And they are well educated.**

Participant 10 (9)
Overall Impression: It was wonderful, very informative. They met my child's needs.
Very overwhelming and emotional at times. I was very concerned about my child and her
needs and I was worried they weren't going to be met. I was focused on that. I do feel
that they understood that we were there to meet her educational needs, her long term
needs. They really helped my husband and I out.

- **Context**
  - Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting. **I did get the paperwork, so I did appreciate that. I was able to review the testing results which were helpful. I knew she needed a 25% delay, and that she didn't have that. I knew that information from the EI specialist.**
  - What if anything could have been helpful to you to receive or know before the meeting? **Nothing.**
  - What kinds of conversations with school personnel did you have before the meeting? **The case manager was very helpful when she was screening her. She gave me some tips to deal with her behavior because I asked a lot of questions. The speech path was very helpful. During the screening they were wonderful and they gave me a lot of information. They see that I'm trying and that it's all about my child and that I want things to be great when she does start kindergarten. Early Intervention does work.**
- **Relationship**
  - Please describe your experience with other people at the table. **They were all informative and open and helpful and the principal was even sincere. I felt welcomed.**
  - What did you notice about the relationships of team members with each other? **They have a great relationship, I liked that. You can tell they are a good team who has worked together before.** With you? **No Response.**

- **Parent Emotional Factors**

    o Tell me about what you liked about the meeting. **Everyone was down to earth, they weren't uptight or a tense meeting.**

    o Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting. **There wasn't anything I didn't like. I didn't mean to cry…I would change that. It's overwhelming and emotional.**

    o If you had any advice for this team before they were to meet with another parent, what would you suggest? **I think they were great.**

- **Closure**

    o Is there anything else you would like to add? **I would always tell a parent to do their homework and read through all their paperwork. Advocate for your child. You are your child's voice. And early intervention works. I think this is a great process and this group has it together.**

Participant 11 (10)

It was emotional; he's come a long way. This is only the beginning though. It's really scary. I come to these meetings to show that I care. Some wouldn't even bother with that.

- **Context**

    o Tell me about what you knew prior to the meeting. **I knew some of the stuff that they were going to say from his IEP. I didn't know the purpose of the meeting. I also didn't know that he was doing well behaviorally at school.**

    o What if anything could have been helpful to you to receive or know before the meeting? **Nothing really.**

    o What kinds of conversations with school personnel did you have before the meeting? **I let the teachers know that I just got him back a month ago, and that he had previously been staying with a family that has teenagers who taught him to use bad language. Also, about a month ago I took my child to the doctor because he had a rash on his bottom, and the doctor told me he had a heat rash. So when I let the school know, they turned around and called the system. That really made me really mad, but I got over it and I got him back. But no one had contacted me about the purpose of this meeting**

- **Relationship**

    o Please describe your experience with other people at the table. **Everything I heard from them was pretty much on point, but it bothered me a little bit because some of that stuff that they talked about is hurtful, but he's making progress. It was hurtful to hear about his cognitive skills.**

    o What did you notice about the relationships of team members with each other? **Everyone was really nice. They actually care for children unlike some.** With you? **No Response.**

- **Parent Emotional Factors**

  o Tell me about what you liked about the meeting. **I liked getting new information.**

  o Tell me about what you didn't like about this meeting. **Nothing.**

  o If you had any advice for this team before they were to meet with another parent, what would you suggest? **I don't really know.**

- **Closure**

  o Is there anything else you would like to add? **I feel like everyone is harassing me, not necessarily the school, but I feel like everybody is watching me. I think people look at me and are impressed because I'm a single parents of a special needs kid. I guess that's what I would tell other parents: don't give up. Just put one foot in front of the other. I took parenting classes, I did whatever the court asked me to do.**

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