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AN INTERN'S EXPERIENCE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AT
SALEM COUNTY SPECIAL SERVICES
SCHOOL DISTRICT

by
Kathleen A. McCarthy

A Masters Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Division
of Rowan University
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Approved by

Professor

Date Approved April 17, 1998

ABSTRACT

Kathleen A. McCarthy

An Intern's Experience in
Educational Leadership at
Salem County Special
Services School District
1998
Dr. Theodore Johnson
Educational Administration

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was in fact a growing number of minority students in special education, if minority staff in special education were being hired in proportion to the number of minority students coming to this particular school district, and finally, whether or not the district was addressing cultural diversity among the staff and student populations due to the increase in minority students.

Initially, a questionnaire was developed for the students. One site in the district was targeted because it had thirty-five emotionally disturbed students. Nineteen emotionally disturbed, high school minority students were interviewed. Other interviews were conducted in and out of the district to determine the level of consciousness among educators regarding minority students and their education.

Statistics were also gathered on the staff and students on the number and ethnic makeup of each group from 1992-1997.

The intern found that the number of minorities in the school district had increased significantly, while the number of minority staff had increased but not in proportion to the

student population. Finally, the intern found that more workshops for the staff and students were needed to bring the school community to a higher level of consciousness in terms of cultural awareness.

MINI-ABSTRACT

Kathleen A. McCarthy

An Intern's Experience in
Educational Leadership at
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Services School District
1998
Dr. Theodore Johnson
Educational Administration

The purpose of this study was to look at the increase between the minority student and staff populations, and to determine what was needed regarding cultural awareness.

It was found that due to the disproportionate increase of minorities within the staff population, education was needed on cultural diversity and sensitivity.

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I would like to thank my husband Barry, and my parents for being so patient during this past year and listening to my concerns, trials and triumphs as the year progressed.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: FOCUS OF STUDY

Six years ago Salem County Special Services School District had one-hundred and thirty-five students. Of those one-hundred and thirty-five students, ninety-four were Caucasian, thirty-six were African American, and five were Hispanic. By 1997 the racial demographics of the district had changed dramatically. The turning point seems to have been in the 1995-1996 school year when there were ninety-six Caucasians, sixty-nine African Americans, and six Hispanics. In September of 1997 the school year began with fewer students due to many factors, such as Inclusion, funding formulas, etc. Regardless of the numbers for 1997, the shift in the racial breakdown of the students is clear: thirty-nine Caucasians, forty-five African Americans, and four Hispanics.

When one looks at the statistics of the past years, one can easily see the ethnic evolution of the student population. This district has been generally unaware of the gradual changes taking place, and consequently, the needs of the students have neither been acknowledged or addressed.

To the knowledge of the intern there has not been a concerted effort until recently to make any changes in the ethnic makeup of the staff. The changes have been positive in terms of creating a more culturally diverse staff. Last year the staff of forty-five consisted of two African Americans and one Hispanic. During the summer of 1997 there was a conscious effort made to make our district more culturally diverse. By September, 1997 the district had seven African Americans, two Hispanics on the staff, and the remainder Caucasian.

To the intern's knowledge however, there has not been any effort exerted towards addressing the educational needs of the changing racial makeup of the student body. This lack of effort is, in the opinion of the intern, not a conscious choice to ignore the situation, but more so a lack of awareness on the part of administration and staff.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The intern intends to examine the changing racial demographics taking place in special education and determine how this change is impacting instruction in our school. It is also the objective to improve the quality of the school and therefore the learning atmosphere for students by acknowledging, and then addressing cultural differences through more relevant instruction, programs, and everyday socialization between students and staff.

The ultimate intention is to get students from all ethnic backgrounds to somehow “connect” with the instruction that is taking place in the classrooms by making the presentations, the materials, etc., more relevant to all the students.

The positive outcome statement will be to increase student satisfaction and achievement by acknowledging the changing demographics in schools and then addressing cultural gaps and differences between students and students, students and staff, and among the staff themselves.

The intern will achieve this through programming and instruction, after (any needed) training is given to administration, staff, and students.

The goal is to determine how much the demographics are changing in the district and then how to most effectively address the issue at hand. By meeting and collaborating with educators in other schools, the intern will discover how other school districts are dealing (or not dealing) with this phenomenon. The intern will also be talking with students, staff, and parents to try to find ways in which to improve the learning atmosphere, and ultimately the educational setting.

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions and terms will be utilized in this study:

1. **DEMOGRAPHICS**-this term refers to dealing with the distribution, density, and vital statistics of populations. The intern will be working on all three areas in the study with particular focus on race.
2. **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**-this term refers to preference in regards to skills, tastes, art, interests, manners, and customs of a given group of people, in a given time period. The intern will examine the cultural differences among the students and staff in order to raise the standards of learning. Anytime acceptance, understanding, and genuine caring to the extent that a group of people take care of each other exists, the standard of learning is automatically raised and improved.
3. **ETHNICITY**-this term refers to the divisions of people distinguished by customs, characteristics, language, and common history. Ethnicity is the affiliation of a particular group and the intern will use the term accordingly.
4. **SOCIAL STRUCTURES**-this term refers to where and how a group within a larger group in society fits in. How and what the group is made up of in terms of smaller groups also defines their social structure. Living or associating in groups or communities is considered a social structure as well. The intern will investigate how staff can relate to students from different cultures to improve their education.
5. **STUDENTS-AT-RISK**-this term refers to any student who is perceived to have a mental, emotional, physical, or socioeconomic disadvantage, that left unaddressed will effect his/her ability to function in school and/or society. All of the students the

intern will be studying are considered “at risk.” Experts say that all students are “at risk” and the intern agrees. However, the extent or level which a child is “at risk” should, in the opinion of the intern, be considered. In other words, if a child is being raised by one parent, lives in a low income area, and the parent works many hours a day, that child should be considered more “at risk” than a child who lives with both parents, one of which is a stay home “mom,” and lives in a middle income area. If one adds in the fact that the first child is also classified, the intern thinks that this child is more “at risk.”

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was confined to one building/site within the Salem County Special Services School District. This site houses thirty-five emotionally disturbed students from Elementary to Senior High grades.

Although the intern took statistics for the entire district, the focus was on the Daretown site because that was where the most demographic changes took place. The student questionnaire was given to the students at the Daretown site.

One limitation to the study may be that the student questionnaire was given to the students individually. The behavior of the students is usually less than optimal, and as each interview progressed, the behavior seemed to deteriorate as the attention spans ran out.

A second limitation may be contacting parents as many do not have phones or automobiles. The intern may have to speak with parents as they come in for meetings rather than on the phone or doing home visits.

A third possible limitation may be resistance, subtle or otherwise, from people in the district. Many of the staff have been in the district for awhile and seem fairly set in their ways of teaching, interacting with others, etc. The attempt on the part of the intern could be perceived as interfering with teaching methods, styles, and even beliefs regarding education. Therefore, some staff members may need an encouraging word and someone to talk to regularly about the often intimidating issue of cultural awareness and differences among students and staff.

The intern felt these were the only limitations of the study as the initial statistics speak for themselves. This study could not only be generalized throughout this district it could be widely accepted in other special education schools, in particular schools with emotionally disturbed students. The research shows a frightening trend of Child Study Teams classifying African American students more quickly than Caucasian students.

The intern saw no other limitations to the study.

SETTING OF THE STUDY

The community setting of Upper Pittsgrove Township is an interesting one. It covers approximately thirty-nine square miles. There are several religions in the area, but the Township remains predominately Presbyterian. Religion in this area seems to be the piece that makes this community strong because it brings so many people together. The second “hub” in the community is the school (not the Salem County Special Services School) but where one of the sites of SCSSSD is located.

This area has a pleasing “mix” of old farms and farming traditions, as well as new families moving into the region from urban areas. Most families moving in are middle and upper-class families of blue and white collar professions. Upper Pittsgrove is classified as an agricultural community, and the majority of the land is still being farmed.

Woven in and out of the farm areas are a few gas stations, a Wa-Wa, a gun shop, RV dealership, landscaping company, hairdresser and an insurance agency. There are no malls, industrial parks, or apartment complexes. Due to the Farmland Preservation Act, none of the above mentioned are allowed to be built in the Township. In addition, all new residential properties are required to be at least five acre parcels. Obviously, this limits the type of people from a socioeconomic standpoint, able to move into the Township.

The ethnic makeup of Upper Pittsgrove is predominately Caucasian, with .012% African-Americans. There are no other ethnic groups in the Township.

The educational setting is also interesting. This educational setting in which the study takes place seems to be constantly evolving. The site is in the town of Daretown ,

and the school's name is the Daretown School. It is one of five sites belonging to the Salem County Special Services School District.

The Daretown School "houses" thirty-five classified emotionally disturbed students. There are five classrooms: one elementary classroom, one middle school classroom, one junior high classroom, and two senior high school classrooms. The students range in age from eight years old to eighteen years of age.

There are five teachers at the Daretown School. Of these, two have their Master's degrees, while the other three hold Bachelor's degrees. The teachers range in age from twenty-four to forty-nine. Of the teachers, only one is non-tenured. One teacher lives in Salem County, one is from Gloucester County, and three reside in Camden County. All five are Caucasian; two are men and three are women.

There are seven teachers aides this year. Five of the aides are in the classrooms and one is a one-to-one aide for an elementary student. The seventh aide is a crisis aide who roams the building and handles the "time out" room for students. Of the seven aides, one has a Bachelor's degree in teaching and the other six have High school Diplomas. The aides range in age from nineteen to forty-nine.

The racial makeup of the seven aides is as follows: one Hispanic female, three African American men, and three Caucasian females.

The school has one Principal, who is new to administration this year. He has worked in this district for three years, previously working with Eligible for Day Training students. The Principal holds his Master's degree, and is a Caucasian male.

The school nurse is a full-time employee and is a Caucasian female.

There are also two Caucasian female secretaries at this location; one for the Principal and one for the Child Study Team. The Child Study Team and Related Services offices are located at the Daretown School. The Related Services staff consists of two groups; one group who works in our district providing services and one group who are “farmed out” to outside districts to provide services.

The staff who work out-of-district consist of two Speech therapists, one Physical therapist, one Occupational therapist, and one Substance Awareness Coordinator.

The staff who work in the district consist of one Speech therapist, one Physical therapist, one Occupational therapist, one Physical Education Therapist, one Horticulture teacher, one Social Worker, one Guidance Counselor, and one Substance Awareness Coordinator. The intern is the Substance Awareness Coordinator as well as the Related Services Coordinator .

Of the eight staff who work in-district on the Child Study Team, six have their Master’s degrees, and two have their Bachelor’s degrees. Ages range from twenty-seven to fifty-six. Of the eight Related Services /CST staff, there is one Hispanic female, three Caucasian females, and four Caucasian males.

There are also two African-American male maintenance personnel who work in the school. One of the men does a lot more than maintenance, and gets involved with the students as much as he can. He has become a positive role model for many of the students.

The Daretown School itself was built in the 1940’s. It was recently purchased by the Salem County Special Services School District, and renovated for use. The building is fairly large and has five classrooms, a CST office, a Principal’s office, Nurse’s office,

“time out” room, Training room, Teacher’s lounge, Horticulture room, Cafeteria, Auditorium, Counselor’s room and several bathrooms.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Special Education schools are overflowing with a rising number of children with emotional and behavioral problems. Students come from many different backgrounds and the reasons they come to special schools are as varied as the students themselves. Research indicates some interesting changes : an aging white population, increasing minorities, and poverty in abundance. Just these three changes alone in education tell us that education will be different in the future than it is now.

There is no longer any doubt among educators that the demographics are changing in education. The question that this intern has is : are educators aware of the shifting demographics and how are they going to address this issue in their schools to make learning/education for all students an optimal experience.

This study and others like it are crucial to the futures of our children. Educators must not remain “fixated” on just simply teaching the academic information to the children. We have to first become aware of the changing demographics, and then educate, train and do what ever it takes to teach in such a way that reaches all of the students. We have to look at ways to “connect” to a growing number of children whose culture is dictating what is important in their world, whether or not the methods go against “mainstream” America. In the end, if we can “connect” or interest the children in school today , their chances of becoming productive citizens will be greatly increased tomorrow.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The subsequent chapters in the research paper will include chapters two, three, four, and five.

Chapter two will focus on a review of the literature that will center on the changing demographics in education. Research shows that as the ethnic makeup across the country changes, so too will the school's demographic makeup. Research shows that the minorities will be in the majority by the year 2000. Keeping in mind that the schools will be filled more and more with minorities, while the educators will be predominately an aging white group, certain things need to be contemplated. The intention of Chapter Two is to consider what measures need to be investigated, and ultimately taken to meet the needs of the children in school, particularly in special education.

Chapter Three will focus on the results of data collected from three sources. The first set of data collected the demographic statistics of the district since 1991. This will be used to show how succinctly the district has changed in terms of the ethnic makeup of the students.

The second set of data collected will be from a questionnaire made up for the students. Individual interviews will be conducted using the questionnaire.

The third set of data will be collected through informal discussions with teachers, parents, and students.

Chapter Four will focus on information found from the three data collection sources.

The first set of data collected will be the statistics of the changing demographics from 1991-1997. It will show the gradual and in some years rapidly changing ethnic makeup of the district.

The second set of data, the student questionnaires, will tell the intern if the school is meeting the needs from a cultural and ethnic standpoint when it comes to the learning, education, and socialization of the students.

The third set of data, the informal discussions, will tell the intern how the district is perceived by the teachers and parents in regards to meeting the needs of our changing student population.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The context in which this study will take place is in Salem County, within the Special Services School District, at one particular site. There are five Special Services sites, and each site has children with various disabilities. The site the intern will be studying is the largest site and the only one the district owns. This site is located in Daretown, New Jersey, and has thirty-five emotionally disturbed students from the elementary grade through high school. There are five classrooms: one elementary, one middle, and three high school classes.

When the intern looked at the student population in the Special Services district for the past six years, the following was found: the white student population has reversed itself with the black student population. Where once the white students were in the majority, they were now in the minority and blacks are now the predominant ethnic group in the school.

It became clear to the intern while reading several journals, articles, books, etc. that the demographics in the country, and thus in education, are changing.

According to several experts, our special educators are composed mostly of an aging white population. In addition, fewer black college students are majoring in special education. In the meantime the ethnic makeup of our students is changing dramatically. Students are becoming more culturally and ethnically diverse, and by the turn of the century the minority students (especially Hispanics, Asians, and blacks) will be the majority.

Even though students are becoming increasingly diverse, research continues to focus solely on the classification(disabilities) of special education students and not on other types of student characteristics like gender and ethnicity. Special education students are a fairly small group of students (which continues to grow) yet they are an extremely diverse group with many needs. Yet, the policy makers in education seem to forget this group of students. This is evident when “America 2000” is read, because it did not directly address education for children with disabilities.

In terms of special education, the experts say that minority students are more quickly put into the system than white students. If this is accurate then one of the first areas that needs to be addressed in this country is special education. The question that emerged for the intern was; how can we as educators meet the needs of our students and how can we help them be more satisfied with school and be better achievers?

Studies show (and have for many years) that standardized tests used to evaluate students for special education need to be examined. Karol A. Reganick, (1995), in her article, “Educating Students with Special Needs from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds,” writes about the ineffectiveness of testing instruments used for assessing the abilities of students from different cultures. Research shows there is a great need for a child’s environment, as well as culture to be considered when devising test instruments.

The trends for minority students in special education are clear: the minority population is increasing, while the white population is decreasing. The prevalence of poverty in many minority communities continues, and many minority children continue to be born with or develop disabilities early in life. Finally, there is the over representation of minority students in special education.

Research is also showing that there is a tremendous need to increase the number of minority professionals in education. If the number of black professionals are declining and yet the minority students are increasing, we, as educators need to quickly implement some type of plan. Most studies show the importance of role models for children, and those benefits increase tremendously if the child can “see” similarities in some of the educators in the school (not only physical characteristics, but ways of socializing as well).

This is the area that the intern will be focusing on in this paper. There is a documented need for educators to become more aware of students from different ethnic backgrounds and cultures. If educators really want to “connect” with students, and find what we have in common, then first we have to know and respect our differences. It is only after we acknowledge our differences, that we can go on and find what we have in common with each other. Research shows that students are as uninformed and uncomfortable about different cultures as are many educators.

This paper will concentrate on issues regarding the change in racial and ethnic demographics in our schools; particularly in special education. The intern will look closely at how these very real issues are affecting our children in school and examine how educators can improve the educational climate in every school so as to improve student satisfaction and student achievement. If we as educators can not make education relevant to students then they will not achieve to their full potential

The intern will focus on the changing demographics in education and determine how the changes are impacting instruction and the goals of education. Particular emphasis will be put on ethnicity and cultural diversity between students and staff. The intern will

also examine the research to determine whether achievement in school is more closely related to class rather than ethnicity.

Harold Hodgkinson, in his research article, "A Demographic Look at Tomorrow," shows clearly that the demographics in this country are changing, and will continue to change. Using the 1990 census, he examined the shifts occurring across the country and where minorities will be most prevalent, (Florida, California, Texas, and New York).

Additionally, Hodgkinson showed the reader, using the 1990 census, that from 1980-1990 the following increases in population took place: white - 9.8%, black -13.2%, Asian/Pacific islander - 107.8%, Hispanic - 53%, and native Americans - 37.9%. Again, along with this growth, different regions in the country increased more significantly than others.

Given Hodgkinson's contention that minorities are more likely to be in poverty than whites (even though most poor kids are white, but blacks and Hispanics have a higher percentage of their total number) and, given the population statistics for the future, how are schools going to effectively respond to these very real changes?

How will they respond, when according to Walter C. Parker (1997) in his article "The Art of Deliberation," by the year 2026, the Hispanic and non-white population in schools will reach seventy percent, the inverse of today's school population.

According to SRI International, a Menlo Park, California based research firm, in 1992 special education included a disproportionate number of black students. While blacks make up almost a quarter of all disabled students, they account for only twelve percent of the general population, the SRI report says.

“Elementary Students At Risk: A Status Report,” told the reader of the demographic changes in the country and education. The numbers of the racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse school-age population is increasing. Many of these students will be considered at-risk students for school failure (Legters, Slavin 1992).

Legters and Slavin also contend as do others that more children with mild disabilities are being placed in special services; those children are usually minorities.

According to Harold Hodgkinson, Nettie Legters , and Robert E. Slavin, the white population is decreasing. In Education Daily (June 1992) the problem predicted will be that the aging white population will not feel inclined to approve of funding for education to improve it for the country’s largely non-white student population. This could be a major problem because according to Hodgkinson by the year 2000, twenty-five percent of our nations children are expected to be living in poverty.

This is without question one of the biggest challenges educators will face in the future: convincing older people that improving the education of students now and in the future will directly affect their own future. Educators will need to find a way to make the older generation feel some kind of ownership or partnership in education.

Judy Wald (1996) in her article, “Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Professionals in Special Education” states that the rapidly changing demographics has created a segment of students who are “multifunded”. “Multifunded” students are those who are eligible for special education and compensatory educational services. Wald also recites Hodgkinson’s research when writing about our society becoming more multicultural and multiethnic than ever before and stressing the extreme importance in addressing the issue.

The interns theory regarding the need to bring about an awareness concerning cultural diversity among students is further supported by L. Baca (1993). Baca writes that teacher education programs play an important role in preparing educators who are cognizant of cultural differences. Baca stressed that personal preparation heightens the skills of future teachers in the area of cultural diversity.

Parental involvement and participation is something that seems to be lacking in special education. However, it is imperative that parents and educators come together to better understand each other, and ultimately the children. Educators may find that what they thought was indifference among parents may have only been a different way of responding to a situation due to the cultural background of the parent (Karol A. Reganick, 1995). Developing positive relations with parents and other community members will prove invaluable to educators.

Obviously, there will be several obstacles along the way. One of those obstacles will be convincing teachers that a child's education and achievement will improve if instruction is improved. More importantly, teachers must improve themselves as human beings who are more aware and sensitized after professional training regarding cultural diversity. According to Baca, providing professionals in special education with training to make them more aware of the needs of minority populations and better to meet those needs is absolutely essential (Baca 1980).

A second obstacle will be increasing the number of minority professionals in special education. As part of a concerted effort in the 1996-1997 school year to increase the number of minority professionals, the intern can state at this point in time, the number of minorities did increase. However, the effort needs to be on-going in the district

because the stress and level of difficulty of the special education positions makes the turnover rate high. C.G. Cole (1990) stresses that not only do we need to increase the number of minority teachers, but administrators as well. In the June 11, 1997 issue of Education Week, D. Viadero wrote that although black children make up 16.5% of the nations public school population, only 7.4% of the teachers are black (of that number, almost half are fifty years old or more).

A third obstacle will be connecting with parents; forming a partnership with them to help the children become better students. We are a group of educators (teachers and parents), and as educators of our children we have to stop looking for the “quick fix,” such as detention homes and prisons and look for better, long term solutions. H. Hodgkinson (1991) in “Beyond the Schools: How Schools and Communities Must Collaborate to Solve the Problems Facing America’s Youth,” recommends a holistic approach to solving some of the problems of today’s youth.

The fourth obstacle will be getting the students to “buy into” something new, whether it is a new program or a new attitude. L. Newman (1992) wrote about the importance of students bonding with their school. In the intern’s school setting there appears to be no evidence of bonding between the students and the school. Again, the intern believes this is due, at least in part, to not meeting the needs of the students and making school seem relevant from a cultural stand point.

There are several thoughts on how to improve education for minority students. One idea is that if educators can develop a plan or an idea that would influence students’ attitudes about learning, than learning would be successful. In order for this plan to be

prosperous, it would also have to affect students' relationships with each other and their teachers, and the alliance of schools to society as well (M. Reil, 1992).

Slavin (1983), Sharan (1984), and Kagan (1986) have researched collaboration methods in the classroom and found that there are ways to increase academic skills, improve social skills, reduce ethnic tensions and increase self-esteem among students. Their findings are especially strong for low-income and ethnic minority students. When teachers shift classroom lessons from whole group instruction to small group projects, there is an improvement in learning that seems to foster positive peer interactions and relationships.

This is the type of change the intern will be implementing in the school. By the teachers making a fairly small change in an instruction technique, such as moving from whole group instruction to small group projects, many positive changes will take place.

Sharan and Hertz-Laqarowitz (1979) developed a procedure for organizing cooperative group investigators within the classrooms. In their model, the teacher creates small groups of students in the classroom. Student groups work together to plan and carry out the task.

Another model that has worked successfully with at-risk students is the Learning Circle design of the AT&T Learning network. This model applies similar procedures for the teacher and the students, but different classrooms interact here. Each classroom is a team group that contributes to the project. This model seems to "connect" students from different social and cultural backgrounds (Riel, 1992).

Riel stresses three changes that occur when using the AT&T Learning Network: There are changes in the relationship among students, changes in the teacher-student relationship and differences in the relationships of the teachers and other educators.

The changes Riel writes about regarding the AT&T program are the types of changes the intern sees as a great need in the Special Services district in order to bring about positive changes. This program, when used, changes relationships automatically. The teacher is no longer the leader, but a member of the problem solving group. This shift in power can cause some educators to feel uncomfortable or as if they are losing control. However, the benefits will quickly override those feelings as students begin to work together and teachers begin to work with others' teachers forming strong bonds.

Spauling and Lake (1991), in a recent experiment found that participation in AT&T Learning Circles can be an effective way to reach the students who fail to achieve in a traditional classroom. They discovered that students were more motivated to write when projects were designed by other students rather than assignments issued by teachers.

One of the issues surrounding special education today is that of inclusion. Many educators feel that special education students are negatively affected from the isolation that occurs in special education. Because Learning Circles is a telecommunication program, classified students interact with students from different classrooms and schools.

The site that this project is taking place in is geographically isolated. This may be a reason for concern when you combine this with the fact that these emotionally disturbed students have been mostly isolated from other students since elementary school. Several times a year I hear from different students in their own words talk about how much they dislike riding in the "small buses" because people associate these vehicles with special

education programs. They also talk about being afraid of returning to their sending district because of being teased, etc. by other students for being sent to a special school. Sadly, some students choose to remain here rather than risk being unaccepted by a new group.

A program such as the AT&T Learning Circles will be the type of program the intern will implement. This program would not only help students and staff within our school, but those students preparing to return to their sending district.

Someone might ask, why make all those changes when things are working, or appears to be working? As educators institution we need to continually be planning new methods of instruction; how to make school more relevant to the students of the 1990's. When one looks at the increasing number of dysfunctional families, at the growing rate of crime, violence, and poverty, and at what the youth are responding to today, one needs to ask more questions about educating our youth. We need to ask why this is happening to our society and then, how as educators can we effectively respond so that the children will benefit, and then ultimately, everyone else will benefit. We as a group will have to work hard on ourselves and others to understand the problem and then respond appropriately.

There is strong evidence that supports the theory that children from low-S.E.S. families will spend more time in a resource room than children from high-S.E.S. families (Ittenbach, R.F., 1990). This is particularly true for Hispanic students who tend to be placed in less racially integrated classrooms or in mainstream settings(Newman, L, 1992). According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study(NLTS) after a five year study, they found that white special education students spent fifty-six percent of their time in

regular education classes, black students spent forty-three percent of their time in regular classes and Hispanic students spent thirty-eight percent of their time in regular classrooms.

By now it should be clear to the reader how complex the issue of changing demographics and meeting the needs of a more culturally diverse student population, is.

The answer should not and can not be a “quick fix” type of solution. One-day workshops for teachers, once a year will not insure a more “culturally aware” group. Making extensive plans for Black History month is a beginning, but acknowledging minorities who are famous for their philosophies or deeds should be an on-going process.

One way we can begin to address the issue at hand would be to rethink workshops for educators. Festus-E Obiakor and Cheryl A. Utley’s (1996) research found evidence that when improperly done, many in-services reinforce negative and low expectations by special education teachers regarding their students. After conducting several case studies Obiakor and Utley found that traditional inservice programs actually promote labeling, misidentification procedures and low teacher expectations. Also, teacher-student interactions adversely affected the self-concept and achievement outcomes of culturally diverse, at-risk students with learning disabilities.

The challenge of integrating or infusing multicultural models will require addressing several areas. The intern has already mentioned academic or curriculum changes as one area. Also mentioned were the problems with test instruments, placement of students in special education, recruitment of and retention of minority faculty. Obiakor writes of one not mentioned up to this point and that is; new ways of thinking. Although

to some this may appear to be the easiest of all things to change that has been mentioned thus far. In fact, the intern would suggest this one event will be the most difficult.

In our country, when people hear that someone is poor, they automatically think they are intellectually low, as if being poor and having a low I.Q. as one in the same. The fact is that ninety percent of the children in special education are poor and receive some type of assistance(Obiakor,1996). Ninety-five percent of the students in education are from a minority group. When people hear about a black child from a poor family, they think the child is intellectually low. What if a member of a child study team goes into an evaluation situation for a minority student and consciously or unconsciously has these ideas? Do we have more minorities in special education because of preconceived ideas?

Jonathan Kozol in his book, "Savage Inequalities," cautions us regarding the notion that poor education is due to family and cultural backgrounds, versus perceptions of educators. The intern will inject here that expectations of parents are often low as well, and that filters out to the child as well as the educators.

We need to make our teacher training's less Eurocentric and more culturally diverse. Teachers are of course, teaching from their own perceptions, values, biases, etc. If a teacher is not a minority, he or she may find it difficult to look at an issue or behavior in a different way. The fact is, various ethnic groups have different values and in order to be able to effectively interact with culturally diverse students, we have to know as much about their ethnic backgrounds as possible.

The intern wants to incorporate training's and workshops given throughout the year, involving everyone from the maintenance man to the superintendent, that will emphasize the strengths, the uniqueness of different minority groups, cultures, etc. As

with everything we learn, we first have to be made aware of an issue, then we need facts about an issue, and then we need to know how to implement changes.

A study done by B.A. Ford(1992) examined the perceptions of special education administrators in implementing district-wide inservice training that focused on issues relevant to African American youth and their families. He divided the responses into three categories. The first category centered on academics, the lack of basic skills and dropping out of school. The second category included factors about family which included: the sense of family powerlessness, pregnancy, the lack of family structure, the moving from school to school, the differences between a students' life experiences in the home and community and school expectations, and the acceptance of students' disabilities and recognition of their strengths. The third category of responses was related to problems within the school and included racial prejudice, the lack of plans for teaching and managing the behavior of students, greater than normal referrals of students to special education, difficulty of adjusting mainstream curriculum and method to meet needs of students, and cultural biases in tests used to make placement decisions.

To address these concerns, Ford recommended implementing a comprehensive inservice training program that involves self-evaluation of attitudes towards cultural diversity, understanding differences, valuing and appreciating diversity, and a strong commitment to the maintenance of diversity. It is clear that Ford proved through his research that training people to teach from a multicultural perspective, rather than just their own perspective has to be an ongoing process. It can not be just a once a year type of event. Training educators to teach differently than they have in the past means asking them to change not only their teaching styles, but their perspectives, attitudes, and

behaviors. This process obviously will involve a long-term process if a quality training is to be accomplished.

There are several programs already developed for educators. One such program was developed by Fradd, Weismantel, Correa, and Algozzine(1988,1990). The program is entitled, “Bilingual/ESOL Special Education INFUSION.” The objectives are to infuse bilingual, multicultural content into curriculum, develop a network of personnel in agencies on the local, state, and national levels, and to develop a personnel preparation model that can be duplicated in other institutions.

The Bilingual Special Education Interagency Collaboration Project was designed to promote interdisciplinary and interagency collaborations needed to facilitate current research and dialogue among institutions of higher education. It is based on a “training of trainers” model which consists of team specializing in the discipline of special education, general education, bilingual education, related services, and administration(Garcia, 1992).

Cloud, Landurand, and Wu, (1989), developed a program entitled, “Multisystem: Systemic Instructional Planning for Exceptional Bilingual Students.” The programs’ objective is to assist general and special educators in improving the deliver of services to culturally and linguistically diverse students with exceptional needs. The program includes video-based training segments, role playing, simulations, and use of cooperative work.

A resource manual was developed by Lockwood, Ford, Sparks, and Allen (1991), to help educators understand the relationship between culture and learning and acquire competencies to enhance the learning environment for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Some of the objectives are: to look at roles people play when change becomes a

consideration within an environment, to examine individual needs, discover individual needs of self-awareness through self-disclosure, and to understand the relationship between change, self-disclosure, and interpersonal skills development, and self-disclosure relative to cultural differences.

Another, and final example of some of the programs available to educators is Project Teams, developed by Utley and Delquadri (1995). The program provides research-proven, culturally responsive instructional strategies, multicultural/bilingual education, and an opportunity to learn instructional effectiveness.

It is imperative that special educators have extensive background in two areas: special education and multicultural education. In order for our educators to be effective in their teaching, they must be trained appropriately starting when they are in college and continuing along when they become educators. In order for teachers to identify, assess, categorize, place, and instruct students with learning disabilities, they must appreciate and value cultural diversity.

If we as educators begin to see how diversity can enrich an environment, then differences among students and staff will be welcomed and not feared or cause teachers anxiety. Obiakor and Ford(1995) described what they called “soulness of assessment,” and the “poverty of the teaching spirit.” They are saying that assessment and pedagogy must have “souls” and the pursuit of excellence must be done with “heart.”

There are some who would disagree with the researchers mentioned thus far in regards to cultural diversity and school achievement.

Minton and Schneider(1985), rather than researching learning styles and multiple intelligences that culturally diverse students with learning disabilities have, wrote about

inherent genetic and pathological deficits(intellectual inferiority). According to Obiakor, this research document in particular touches on one of the major weaknesses of traditional research in education.

Herrstein and Murray(1994) in their book, “The Bell Curve,” wrote about the biological determinism of African American students without suggesting remedies for enhancing their academic achievements. One of the flaws in their research was that they used traditional intelligence test scores that epitomizes structural, technical, and scientific aspects of racism when interpreting minority students’ test results(Obiakor, 1996).

Both high and low expectations that educators often place on children need to be examined along with looking into the relationship between those expectations and ethnicity.

For example, in 1903 W.E.B. DuBois in his book, “The Souls of Black Folk,” a critique of Booker T. Washington’s work, disagreed with Washington’s theory of vocational education. Washington thought vocational education would be a benefit for African Americans and DuBois warned the reader of the potential damage this idea could do to the future education of African Americans. DuBois thought this action would interfere with any other type of education(advanced or otherwise) for African Americans. His arguments are a strong warning for educators to be cautious and aware of their expectations for student achievement.

Evidence shows that black and white preschool children, when observed, behave differently in the classroom(Almanza and Mosley, 1980). White children seem to be more passive in the classroom, staying in their seats for longer periods of time, and in short, fitting in with the Eurocentric idea or perception of how to behave in the

classroom. Black children, on the other hand, ran and jumped, and in general did not stay in their seats as long as the white children. According to Almanza and Mosley, black children have a richer movement repertoire than white children. It is easy to see how many minority children could become labeled as behavior problems because of their behavioral styles and many educators' Euro-American expectations and beliefs.

Janet C. Richards(1996) in her article entitled, "Good Days/Bad Days: Learning to Teach in Two Different Multicultural Schools," discovered several factors after sending eighty-eight pre-service teachers to two elementary schools in New Orleans, Louisiana. After sending the teachers to the schools , the need for more monitoring of the student teachers was recognized. Also it was clear that there was a need for more training in the area of multicultural issues to help shape the student teachers in terms of their views on diversity, their pedagogical actions, and ultimately, their teaching styles.

The intern has to question why people appear to be threatened or afraid of people who are different from themselves. Just what are the roots of cultural conflicts, and how can they be resolved for the children in special education so their educational experiences can be more positive.

If we ignore these questions and others pertaining to education and cultural diversity we will not be doing justice to the children. It is clear to the intern that culture and how educators react to differences affects academic learning and achievement among students. If educators can embrace diversity, diversity itself can become a strong tool for positive changes in education.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

General Description

Given that the racial demographics have changed and continue to change across the nation, but more specifically, in the Salem County Special Services School District, the intern made the determination to study this phenomenon and the actions taken by the educators involved with this district. The intern's hypothesis was as follows: How have educators in the Salem County Special Services School District addressed the issue of changing racial demographics?

The research the intern conducted was qualitative in nature. After collecting solid data using statistics from Salem County Special Services School Districts' records, a hypothesis was developed. The intern then developed a student questionnaire.

It was hoped the information gathered from the student questionnaires would answer questions the intern had regarding the change in racial demographics in special education and how the district had addressed those changes.

An observational study was also conducted by observing the daily interactions that took place between staff and students in regards to cultural and ethnic differences. This study was conducted by the intern and the social worker located at this particular site.

Statistics from school records were collected by the intern in reference to the student ethnic makeup of the entire district over the past six years.

The intern counted the entire district for two reasons: the first, because Salem County Special Services School District is a small district and in order to see the substantial racial demographic shift, the intern needed to count all the students in the district, and secondly, many of the students move within the district from year to year to different sites due to their age, behavior changes, change in classification, etc.

Interviews were also conducted with professionals from other special education schools regarding their perceptions of racial demographic changes taking place in their own schools and whether or not they were addressing the issue.

The intern also spoke with parents to find out what their perceptions were of their child's school environment, their level of achievement, and whether they felt some issues needed to be addressed in terms of cultural diversity.

Development and Design of the Research Instruments

The questionnaire designed for the students included seven items. Each item included only one question. The instrument did not include any open-ended questions. Questions four, five, and six were each followed by a set of possible responses so that each student could designate, or tell the interviewer which response was relevant to them as a student. The intern did not include a category called "other." In the intern's opinion, it would have been difficult for the questions to be misinterpreted by the students with the possible exception of question number seven; "Do you feel different from other students and staff in any way?" "If so, how?"

The intern's intention while using the questionnaire was to examine how the staff and students who were not minorities were perceived by the minority students. In

addition, the intern wanted to discover how minority students view the education in terms of quality and relevancy to their lives.

The questionnaire was used to interview half of the students classified as emotionally disturbed at the Daretown school site; the largest site in the district. The intern met with only minority students which included Hispanics and African American students only as the district does not have any other minorities in the district at this time. Because of the severity of the emotionally disturbed behavior of the students, the intern felt compelled to write down the responses of the students during each interview, rather than give the students the questionnaire to complete on their own.

The intern also did an observational study of the staff and students pertaining to their social interactions with each other regarding ethnic differences. This was done on a weekly basis.

Statistics were also collected from school records in terms of the racial demographic changes in this particular district over the past six years. The statistical information was gathered in the following manner:

First, the intern collected statistics on the racial makeup of the students for the past six years for the entire district.

Secondly, the intern collected statistics on the racial makeup of the particular Daretown site for the 1997 school year.

Thirdly, the intern collected data on the racial makeup of the staff six years ago and for the 1997 year.

The intern also interviewed professionals from other special education schools. A total of six representatives were interviewed regarding the changing demographics in special education and how they addressed those changes.

Description of the Sample and Sampling Technique

The population sample was derived from the students at the Daretown site of Salem County Special Services School District. Approximately half of the students classified as emotionally disturbed were interviewed.

Nineteen out of thirty-four students answered this questionnaire and only the older students in the middle and high school classes were interviewed. The intern felt that interviewing the older students would result in more accurate information mainly because the students have been in the district longer and have more experience to pull from. The students interviewed were Hispanic and African American students only; no white students were given the questionnaire.

This particular site was chosen because out of the five sites which are part of Salem County Special Services School District, this site had the most change in the racial makeup of the student population over the past six years.

Description of the Data Collection Approach

The data collection approach included using student questionnaires to determine if, in the students' perceptions there actually was a need for a more culturally and ethnically aware educational environment.

The intern also spoke with parents in an effort to get a sense of how they, as parents perceived their child's school environment and whether or not they felt their needs were being addressed.

In addition, the intern spoke with several other professionals in the field of education (primarily principals and Child Study Team members) in an attempt to acquire their impressions of the educational environment in which they work in terms of cultural differences and the manner in which they have been addressed.

The statistics from the Salem County Special Services School District regarding the racial makeup of the student body was compiled in a few different ways. First, statistics were collected from 1992 through 1997 of the racial composition of the student population. Secondly, the numbers of white, black, and Hispanic students were compiled for the Daretown site for the past six years. And finally, the racial makeup of teachers, teachers' aides, substitutes, etc. were gathered from 1992 and then compared to 1997.

Evidence to Prove that the Project is Having an Impact on a Particular Practice

Evidence was present from the various data that proved this particular project had some sort of impact on the district. The intern attempted to collect enough data from various sources to show that there are major racial demographic changes that have occurred and will continue to occur within special education.

There is not doubt that in the Salem County Special Services School District the demographics in terms of the ethnic makeup of the emotionally disturbed student population dramatically changed over the past six years.

The intern showed also with statistics, that the ethnic diversity among some of the categories of staff has changed to better meet the needs of the culturally diverse student population. However, the three areas that need to be examined in the future are the Child Study Team staff, the teaching staff, and administrative staff. There appeared to be a need for more diversity in all three areas.

Information derived from the discussions with outside sources were met with frustration. The intern was continually made aware that conscience efforts and awareness was indeed not present among several professionals within the educational field when the issue of meeting the needs of a more culturally diverse student population was mentioned.

Student interviews gave the intern a chance to hear from students about their feelings and perceptions and it became clear that the district had not made a conscience effort to improve this particular educational environment. This point was made even more clear to the intern when weekly observations were done in the school.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

What Information was Found

The information the intern found was surprising as well as interesting.

First, the racial demographics in the district has been gradually changing since 1992. Each year, the district is receiving fewer Caucasian students, about the same number of Hispanic students, and more African American students.

For example, in 1992, the districts' statistics on the student population indicated there were ninety-four Caucasians, thirty-six African Americans, and five Hispanics. By the year 1997, the statistics were thirty-nine Caucasians, forty-five African Americans , and four Hispanic students(see Appendix A).

In contrast to this, in 1992, the district had fifty staff members, one of which was an African American.

By 1997, out of a staff of fifty-four, there were forty-five Caucasians, two Hispanics, and seven African Americans(the Board of Education was not included in this count or the 1992 count, however all members were in 1992 and presently are Caucasian). Unfortunately, at this time, the district does not have even one African American teacher. However, there is one Hispanic teachers' aide and three African American aides. The Related Services staff consists of an all Caucasian staff with the exception of one Hispanic therapist(see Appendix B).

The ethnic makeup of the staff has positively changed to include a more ethnic variety of staff members.

However, the intern believes the district needs to continue to make it a priority to hire more minority staff members, in particular, African American instructors, to better balance the ethnic makeup of the student population.

The intern also created a student questionnaire in an attempt to find out if the students felt or sensed a difference between the ethnic makeup of the students and the ethnic makeup of the staff(see Appendix C). This questionnaire was used at our largest site “housing” thirty-eight emotionally disturbed students.

Out of nineteen students interviewed, five refused to answer the questions asked. The other fifteen students answered the questionnaire when they were interviewed by either the intern.

The questionnaire the intern developed, asked some very basic questions in the beginning and end of the document. There were only seven questions and the intern hoped that questions four and five would be the most revealing.

Upon initial review of the student responses, the intern did not find much information that was very revealing in terms of students and their perceptions of the ethnic differences between themselves and students and staff. After a second, more careful reading of the responses, some issues were discovered that the intern found quite interesting.

Again, the intern wants to remind the reader the students interviewed are classified emotionally disturbed. Many of the students are very uncomfortable with questions and tend to become quickly agitated, defensive, and, in some instances hostile(hence, the five refusals). Even though the intern has known the students for years, even the fifteen students who answered the questionnaire were noticeably anxious.

Question number four on the questionnaire was; “Do you ever feel like you can not really say what is on your mind to your teacher or counselor?” “If yes, what stops you from speaking your mind?”

- a. the age difference?
- b. the gender of the staff person?
- c. the color of the staff person?
- d. don't want to be judged?
- e. may get in trouble?

One student responded to question number four by saying the teachers and counselors didn't understand him. The intern understands this response could mean many things. However, when asked question number five; “What could the staff do to make academics more interesting?” the same student responded by checking “c,” “teach subjects more relevant to my lifestyle.”

Another student answered question number four by saying “no” to every item. When he got to letter “c” which is “the color of the staff person,” he said “No, I don't care as they can teach me.” In question number five, he checked “c” which is “teach more subjects relevant to my lifestyle.” Then in response to question number seven, “Do you feel different from other students and staff in any way? If so, how?” The same student answered; “Sometimes because I am the only Mexican in here.”

A third student did check “c” in question number four, “the color of the staff person,” but did not reveal anything else on his questionnaire about cultural differences and would not talk more about question number four.

Many students answered question number five, by circling “c,” “teach subjects more relevant to my lifestyle.”

The intern had a very difficult time in terms of parent contact and discussions. Most of the students in this school district are living in one parent homes. Some of the parents are working two jobs just to make ends meet. This particular group of parents were so difficult to contact. Also, many parents can not receive calls at work unless it is an emergency, so the intern was stifled in terms of calling them at work during the day or early evening. Also, many of our parents do not have telephones, so the only way the district has contact is through the mail system. Home visits were difficult as they can not be done without another staff member accompanying the staff person conducting the visit. The intern did have a few successful home visits, in that the parents were home and answered my inquiries. Both parents, one mother, and one father did not see any problem or reason to be concerned with the school. Both parents were just happy that the staff is able to get their students to come to school and do a reasonable amount of work. Both parents have high hops and expectations for their children and trust that the staff will be a major influence in their development. Both parents felt they as parents had lost control of their children and are counting on the school to assist them. The cultural imbalance between the staff and students was not a concern at all. The mother is an African American woman and the father of the second student, is Hispanic.

I spoke with ten parents in January at the schools’ D.A.R.E. graduation when they came to the school to see the ceremony. Again, all of the minority

parents felt that the ethnic balance between the students and staff was not even an issue. The intern was surprised to learn that not even one parent had seemed to even consider the cultural differences as an issue let alone whether or not the district was addressing those differences in some way. The intern began to realize that so many parents today are living day-to-day and trying to survive and put food on the table.

The perception, or point of view the parents had was quite similar to what the intern found when speaking to educators in other school districts. Both Caucasian and African American educators said consistently to the intern ,they saw no issue with an imbalance of the ethnic makeup between students and staff. One African American administrator said he thought a Caucasian counselor could make just as great an impact on an African American student as an African American counselor. This particular administrator saw no problem with ethnic imbalance between students and staff. And, yet, time after time this intern observed students in her own school who, when they were upset headed directly for the staff person who was most like them. This was observed by the intern who saw Caucasian students going to Caucasian staff, African American students going to African American staff, and Hispanic students going to Hispanic staff when they were upset about something. One Caucasian administrator said in response to balancing or making the ethnic makeup of staff more equal, “We send out the advertisement, and interview applicants.” “That’s all we have to do.” That was the extent of one school districts’ effort to create a more even ethnic balance in their school.

When the intern spoke with the teachers in the district, again the response was similar to the parents and other educators outside of the district. The staff in the district felt there was not a problem in terms of the ethnic imbalance. One staff member said, "Well, it's better than it was a few years ago."

With these perceptions in mind, it can not come as a surprise to anyone that the programs dealing with cultural diversity are few. Many educators felt that by acknowledging Black History Month in February they were fulfilling any "requirements" in terms of being culturally aware. In terms of staff, the intern who is the Affirmative Action Officer does a presentation each September on different types of harassment and inequalities. In addition to that program, this year the intern has scheduled Mr. Robin Parker from the Office of Bias Crimes in Trenton, NJ to speak with the staff in March 1998. It is the goal of the intern to create a more sensitive atmosphere in the district to ethnic differences and also an appreciation of those same differences. It is also the goal of the intern to encourage administrators to make a great effort when interviewing potential staff members to remember the ethnic balance between the students and staff. Recently a new staff member was hired to fill a position; the person is a male Hispanic. The district gradual strides, but much more needs to be done.

The students are receiving some, but not enough education concerning different ethnic groups. Two high school classes have read, "Malcolm X." Another middle school class read about famous minority athletes.

The intern distributed magazines to the teachers at one site earlier in the year to assist them in teaching about Genocide and the Holocaust. To date, one

out of the five teachers has instructed her class concerning genocide and the holocaust.

Also this year one of the Hispanic teachers' aides taught one high school class how to cook an Hispanic dinner. The students loved this activity and seem to want to do more. It is the goal of the intern to ask the staff to cook some type of food that is part of their ethnic background and bring it to school. The foods will be labeled and the students will get to taste a little from each dish.

In April or May the intern has scheduled two Philadelphia Phillies players, one African American and one Caucasian to come to our school and talk to the students about staying in school. They will also play baseball with the students and stay for a barbecue. The intern scheduled the D.A.R.E. and G.R.E.A.T. programs for the school this year. The G.R.E.A.T. program spends quite a bit of time discussing gangs, violence, and getting along with people who are different from themselves.

In addition to the programs above, the intern has scheduled a speaker to come to the school and speak to the students in small groups about cultural diversity. Parents will be invited to the program, but because attendance will probably be small, the program will be videotaped, copies made and sent home for parents to view. The program is scheduled for May 1998. If this program is successful, the intern will schedule it again for September or October of the 1998-99 school year.

What Did The Information Mean?

The intern is just beginning to realize all the issues involved with this project. The various sources of information, although all related, can each mean several things.

First, with the shift in racial demographics in the district, many questions arise. Are Child Study Teams classifying minority students more quickly now, and if they are, why? Does it have to do with preconceived ideas or are the numbers of classified minority children just simply increasing? One has to question whether or not there is a preconceived notion among some educators in relation to minorities. Shouldn't educators be extensively trained in cultural differences so that when certain behaviors are observed with children who are different from themselves, ethnicity and culture can both be taken into consideration?

Second, in addition to training educators more thoroughly about cultural differences, training is needed about how to interact more effectively in all ways with students and staff who are culturally or ethnically different from themselves.

Also, the intern feels educators really need to teach a lot more about different ethnic groups on an ongoing basis and not just during Black History Month and other minority holidays. Research has shown that any goal if it is to be effective has to be repeated in some way or method on an ongoing consistent manner.

The intern has no doubt that all of the parents interviewed love their children. What the intern found was a group of parents who have been through a lot with their child's behavior. They have been to physicians, psychologists; the

child has been tested and tested with the end result of a classification of emotionally disturbed. The end result for many of the parents, is relief that now there is a school for their child, where their child has a chance to be successful. What many parents and educators do not realize is how much better the education could be if time was taken to address some very important issues regarding cultural diversity. The intern also wonders if any of the responses would have been different if she were not Caucasian. In other words, maybe the trust level and familiarity level needs to be higher in order for parents to speak their minds.

The students, the intern found, also need awareness education. In particular, for the students tolerance of differences has to be the focus.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FURTHER STUDY

Major Conclusions For The Project

The intern found that most students, parents, and educators, in and out of the district are just not discussing the concept of cultural diversity and its implications regarding the education of children.

The reasons for not discussing, debating, or exploring cultural diversity appeared to the intern to be varied. One reason stood out dramatically to the intern and that was the desire to maintain the status quo. It became quite clear that for all people involved, change is a frightening entity. It was easier, in the minds of some, to not take the risk nor the challenge, even if it meant that ultimately, the education of all the children would be of a lesser quality than it could be.

Addressing the issue of the changing racial demographics and cultural diversity meant facing some uncomfortable and even painful realities to some people. The intern could not envision a way to avoid this pain, but was convinced the rewards would be invaluable to our children, parents, and educators. Growth sometimes involved dealing with thoughts and feelings that were not be very pleasant, but were necessary in order to make positive changes.

Major Conclusions For The Intern's Leadership Development

There is no question that the intern's leadership strengths and qualities multiplied while going through the process of researching the topic at hand. Midway through the project the intern realized that change would not be an event, but a process. With the issue of understanding cultural differences and tolerance, it became clear that not only

was this issue one that involved a process and not just an event, but that it must be ongoing, always discussed, and continually reexamined.

The intellectual growth for the intern was immeasurable. Not only did the intern begin to examine current practices in the district but also ways of thinking, perceptions people had, and their behavior. It was particularly interesting for the intern to talk with people about their perceptions and beliefs and then watch the behavior that followed.

This issue forced the intern to examine her own thoughts and behavior as it became crystal clear that a person can say just about anything, but the behavior that follow is most important. The intern realized that as a future administrator just how important it will be to act as a change agent when it comes to bringing people from different cultures together, ready to work as a team.

As the intern stated in Chapter four, this was, and continues to be a very complex issue which really needs to be examined piece by piece to get to the root of the situation. All of the issues which arose were considered by the intern and were a challenge in terms of attempting to bring about an awareness among the staff. From academic issues, like what is or is not being taught in the classroom, to social issues like behaviors that are different from our own; the intern had to widen her perceptions concerning the issue at hand and all of the people involved with it. Furthermore, this growth process was a gradual and natural progression which seemed to evolve after doing research on the topic, speaking to staff, students, and parents, observing the behaviors of all involved, and realizing the contradictions that existed between what was said by those involved and their behavior.

The end result for the intern was the realization that this issue of cultural diversity, changing demographics, and tolerance of differences can not be addressed by only acknowledging Black History Month, or bringing in speakers or other representatives to talk to the students, parents, and staff once or twice a year. Programs and speakers were very important to bring about awareness among people and to reinforce an idea or philosophy, but this issue is one that has to be lived, felt in the heart and soul of all people, and in particular, educators. It is an issue that has to be ongoing; all day, all night; an all consuming process and is something students have to hear in people's words as well as see in their behavior.

As a leader, this issue tested the intern constantly. The intern had to listen to many people with opposing views, many people who just had not given the topic much, if any thought at all, and some who just did not want to discuss the issue. This harsh reality forced the intern to reorganize the initial plan to have a formal committee, to have groups of people willing to sit around and discuss cultural diversity and how the school district could provide a better education in relation to it. The intern realized that this was not going to be an easy topic to discuss. What the intern found was that the targeted audience was not as far advanced as was hoped, and therefore, was forced to go back further than intended. The intern had to begin to "plant a seed" in order to just get to a beginning point. It was quickly realized that this issue and any positive changes that may take place in the future would require patience, endurance, tolerance, and time.

Major Conclusions For The Change Brought About In The Organization

One of the most optimistic changes was the interest that was sparked by the speaker, Mr. Robin Parker, Deputy Attorney General from the Office of Bias Crimes in

Trenton, New Jersey This speaker succeeded in making people begin to think about their perceptions and behaviors when it comes to people different from themselves. The intern felt that Mr. Parker presented information about cultural diversity, acceptance, and tolerance in a very honest and forthright manner, and in a way that could not be ignored by anyone. He also was very skilled in getting his message across to the staff in a way that was non-threatening. He had people evaluate themselves and each other. However, the section when he had the group assess themselves appeared to be the most profound for everyone.

Change in this area of education, in particular, in this area of New Jersey, is going to be gradual. Although the intern believes the atmosphere has begun to change and the staff has started to examine their way of thinking and behaving, there is a lot of room for improvement.

It seems that it would be essential for the small communities and schools in Salem County to stop separating themselves from each other and viewing themselves as an island. Many of the elementary and middle schools are not racially balanced in Salem County. When the students graduate from eighth grade, they are sent to one of three high schools which includes many different ethnic groups. What are educators doing to prepare students in a positive way for the changes they are faced with when they go to high school? Since the Special Services School is a receiving district their students go to either Salem High School, Pennsville High School, or Woodstown High School. What does the minority student do in any of the above mentioned schools? In Woodstown High School and Pennsville High School the minority student would be an African American student; in Salem High School, the minority student would be the Caucasian

student. How have these students been prepared to effectively, positively, and humanely to interact and relate to each other ? Without assistance and guidance from a racially and ethnically balanced group of educators who are culturally and ethnically aware, this challenge may not be possible to achieve.

Major Implications Of The Study In All Areas

There is no doubt in the intern's mind that this study affected all areas, everyone, all the time. People's way of living, thinking, and behaving is systemic in nature. How a person behaves at work is a product of his or her past and will be a predictor about how that person will behave and respond to students in the classroom.

In terms of the project, the intern felt that just by speaking with the staff, parents, and students the awareness level was brought to a higher level.

The difference between this project and one for example, on technology, was that people's backgrounds, lifestyles, and way of living required examination in order to progress, or move forward. In the future, this project will involve much thought, patience, compassion, tact, and non-judging on the part of every stakeholder. The intern was dealing with a very sensitive, complex issue which involved human behavior, cultural backgrounds, personalities, and more.

The Need For Further Study

There is no doubt this issue needs to be further examined. The county where the study took place is blatantly racially separated.

Further study on this issue may indicate what needs to be done for the students in the Special Services school as well as the other students in Salem county.

More research has to be conducted on the social as well as educational ramifications of having a racially balanced staff to fit the racial balance of the student population. More research needs to be done on the positive affects of a culturally and racially “aware” and tolerant staff in relation to student achievement.

The intern thinks that change will have to be made slowly in order for any kind of change to be successful. More research needs to be done to determine just how to create a desire within the staff to make the necessary changes. This is where a vision and a mission statement that the staff believes in will be vital to the success of this school district and other school districts in the county and, in the nation.

Finally, because schools are mini-societies of the larger society, the need for awareness of differences, tolerance of differences, and ideas on how to proceed to make differences among people a positive, educational issue is imperative for the children.

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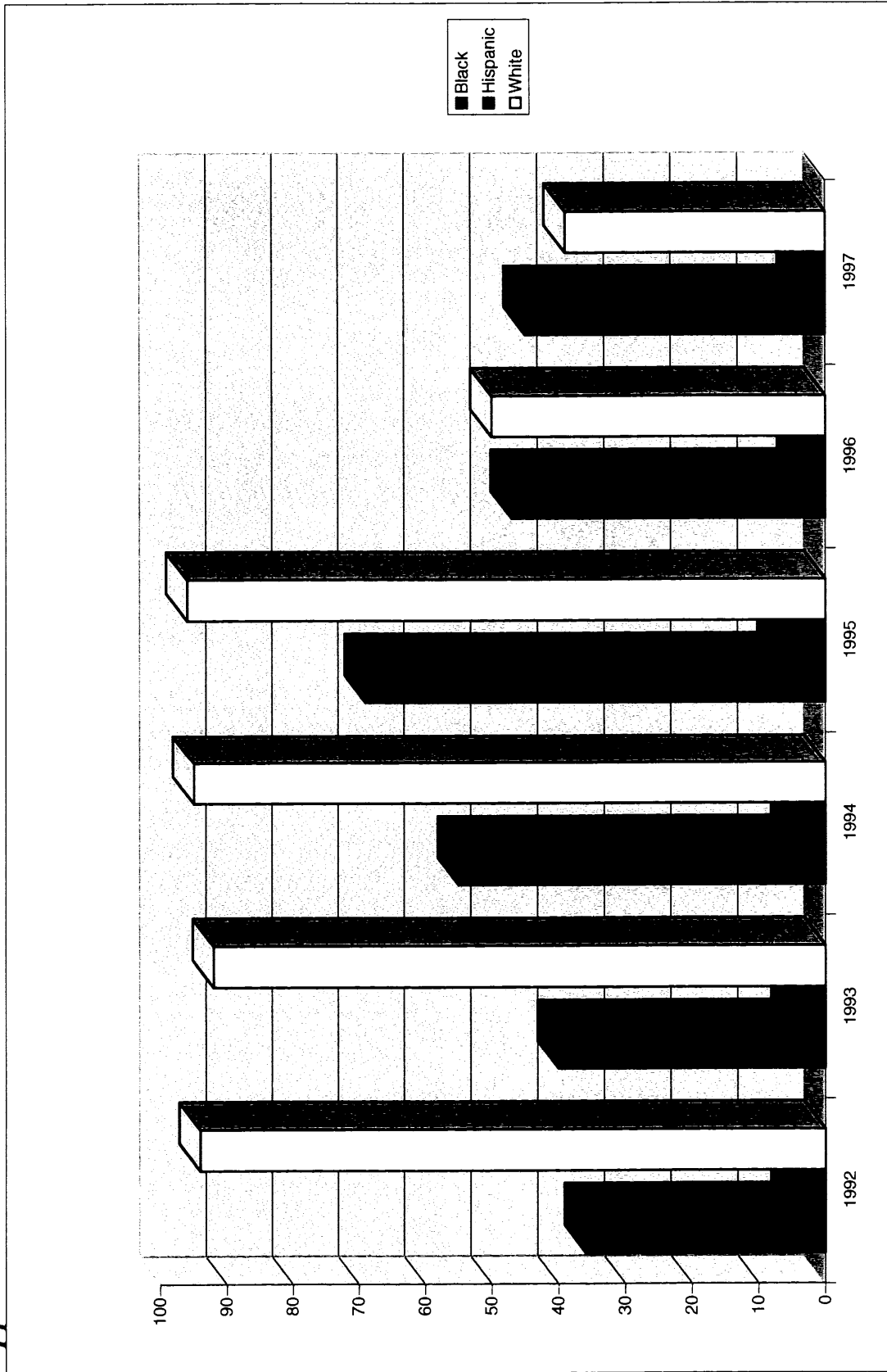
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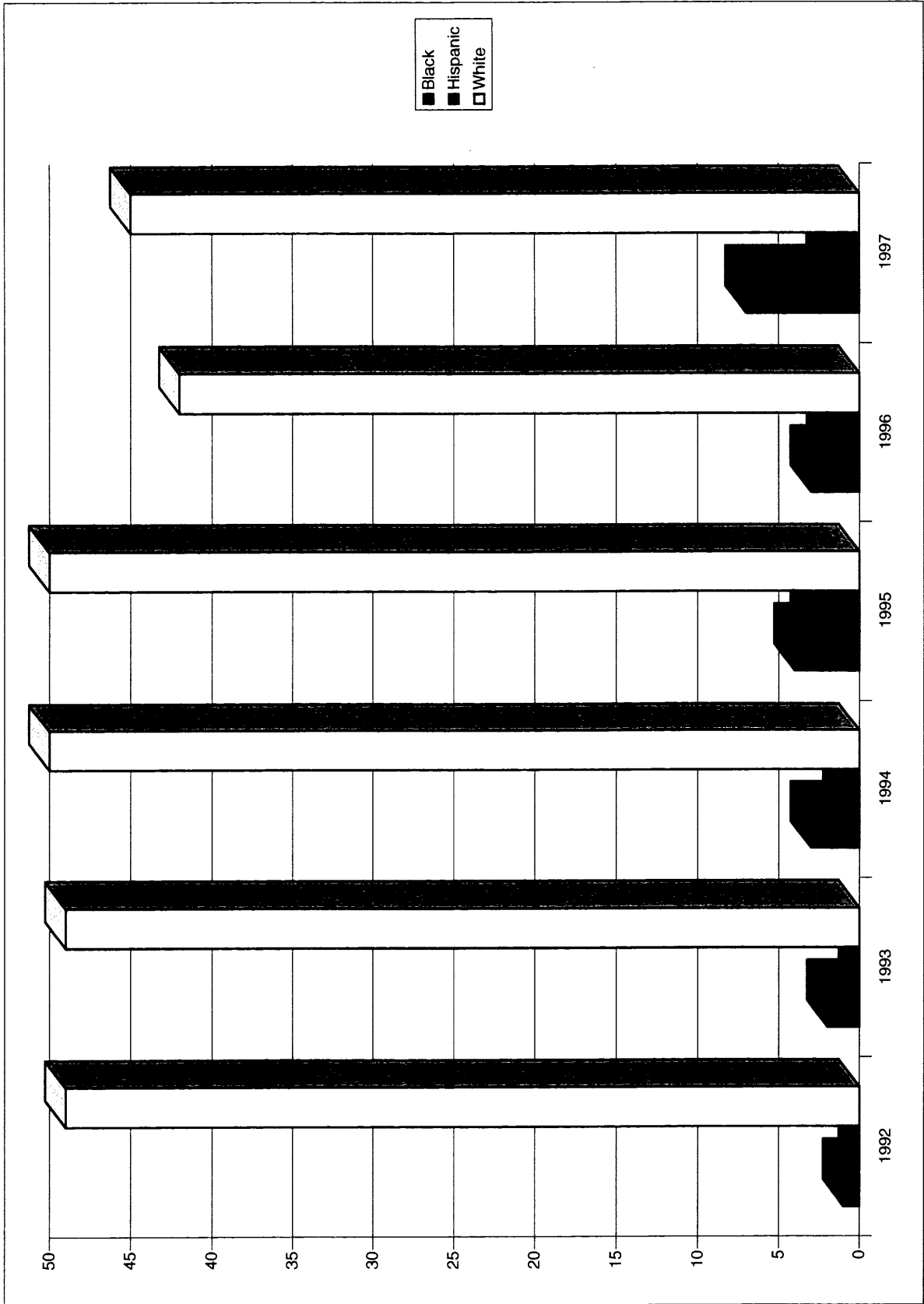
APPENDIX A
STUDENT POPULATION

Appendix A - STUDENT POPULATION - ETHNIC MAKEUP - 1992 THRU 1997



APPENDIX B
STAFF POPULATION

APPENDIX B - STAFF POPULATION - ETHNIC MAKEUP



APPENDIX C
STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Appendix C Questionnaire

- 1.) What do you like best about the Daretown School?
- 2.) What do you dislike about the Daretown School?
- 3.) What would you like to see added to the school that would make school better for you?
- 4.) Do you ever feel like you can't really say what's on your mind to your teacher or counselor? If yes, what stops you from speaking your mind?
 - a.) The age difference _____
 - b.) The gender of staff person _____
 - c.) The color of the staff person _____
 - d.) Don't want to be judged _____
 - e.) May get in trouble _____
- 5.) What could the staff do to make academics more interesting?
 - a.) Teach subjects that are more interesting to me _____
 - b.) Teach subjects on the computer _____
 - c.) Teach subjects more relevant to my lifestyle _____
- 6.) What was something you liked about the last school you were in?
 - a.) Buildings _____
 - b.) Students _____
 - c.) Subjects _____
 - d.) Teacher _____

What was it you liked about it/them?
- 7.) Do you feel different from other students and staff in any way? If so, how?

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

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