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***HOW PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT INCREASES THE ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS***

***A Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of***

MASTER OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the department of

EDUCATION

at

LYNN UNIVERSITY

Boca Raton, Florida

by

ESPERANCE ST. LOUIS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

On July 26, 1990, before more than two thousand cheering advocates for people with disabilities, President George Bush signed into law a monumental piece of legislation; a far-reaching federal law that prohibited discrimination against a group that is now estimated to number 49 million or more Americans. Public Law 101-476, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 1990 (IDEA) is the most sweeping anti-discrimination measure since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. ("The New York Times, July 27, 1990, P. A-26.")

In addition to IDEA, America 2000, an agenda for educational reform, established at the national level was adopted by President George Bush and the nation's governors in 1990. The "America 2000" was expanded under the Clinton administration, with a new name "Goals 2000" which added a major goal that focused on parental involvement and teacher training. This objective clearly stated that no one group could deal with the myriad of problems that children face today. The parental concern and procedural safeguard are an invitation for parents' participation in educating school children. First, Goals 2000 offers opportunity for all teachers to acquire knowledge and skills needed to prepare U.S. students for the next century; second, every school in America will promote parental involvement in their children's education. This is a clear indication that our schools need new ways to think and foster parental and community involvement in educating America's children.

Preparing young Americans to enter the work force is one of the primary concerns

for the United States Government and there is no doubt that this priority will probably be recognized at the beginning of the next century. A demographic source predicted that in the year 2010 the states of New York, Texas, California and Florida will have about one third of the nation's youth and more than half of them will be children of ethnic minority background. Currently, eighty-two percent of children have working mothers. Business and government must respond to the rapidly increasing demand for child care. Sixty percent of all children will spend some time with a single parent before the age of 16.

(Institute for Educational Leadership(IEL), 1992).

This same prediction indicated that the U.S. population is rapidly aging. There are thirty million people over the age of sixty-five and this will increase to 65 million by the year 2020. Children less than 18, which were estimated to be thirty-four percent of our total population in 1970, will make up twenty-five percent of our population in 2000. Even though the number of children is decreasing, approximately thirty percent of children in 1992 were considered to be at serious risk of failure in school and in life. Between 1980 and 1990, the U.S. population increased by 10%, but the prison population increased by 139%, costing taxpayers more than \$20,000 per individual, per year. Eighty percent of this prison population were high school dropouts. The United States now leads the world in the percentage of our population behind bars. One prisoner consumes the amount of money it would cost to enroll six children in Head Start programs.

Is this alarming projection clearly saying that the time has come for a change in

attitude? Some parents have shared the attitude that once a child enters school it is best to leave his or her education to the professionals. The argument has been that, after all, teachers are the ones trained to do the job. Besides the structure of modern curricula seems probably too complex for most parents to grasp. And what about parents who can hardly read or write? How can they help their children learn anything? Through research, we now know that parental involvement improves students' achievement (Decker & Gregg, 1996). Parental participation can take several forms: Individual parent conferences, parent meetings for the purpose of social events or orientation, and donations. These types of activities do not challenge the expertise of the teacher; therefore, they do not create any discomfort or conflict with the school decision making power. The most challenging and demanding levels of parental involvement are such activities that involve parents in teaching their own children and making decisions regarding educational policy.

Joan (1976) related that the issue of parental involvement especially for early childhood development is a crucial and pivotal responsibility. To establish the foundation of parental involvement, with all the responsibility that it entails in caring, nurturing, and educating young children, many parenting activities require the understanding and the cooperation of the classroom teacher and the school's personnel. It is imperative that today's culture takes care to facilitate parents' schedules, employment, current interest, culture and educational background. Respect for such things will create a conducive home and school environment (p.28).

MISSING

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Since the inception of the Head Start Program in 1965, federal and local interest in early prevention programs has continued to be forceful. In particular, a section of Public Law 101-475, and PL99-457 addressed educational programming for children from birth to five. These laws were revised in 1991 as PL102-119 and were amended to the Individual with Disability Education Act, reasserting the requirement that parents play a crucial role in identifying, diagnosing, placing, and programming children with special needs. Indeed, these laws required the establishment of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), which is a document required by Public Law 99-457, to plan early intervention services for infants, toddlers, and their families (Meyen, 1996). This segment of the law is an invitation to parents with the purpose of increasing parental participation in the educational process of a disabled child.

Several researchers have shared a list of procedures, which parents and professionals can apply, and goals which they can implement, to successfully increase the level of performance of a disabled child. (K. A. Gorham and her colleagues, 1976; M. Karnes and J. A. Teska, 1980; I. H. Carney, 1983). The suggested procedures and goals are:

1. Parents must be involved every step of the way; the rapport and dialogue established between parent and professional provides an essential communication base between the professional and the parents and other family members.
2. Parents should be fully participating members of the treatment team; this means that professionals must be able to communicate without technical language or jargon and must give parents clear and accurate information. (This statement carries implicit suggestions that there will be disagreements from time to time among the team members [including parents], and professionals must have practical ways to negotiate differences and resolve disputes.)

3. Professionals must be able to recognize individual differences among families and be flexible in providing services to fathers, mothers, and siblings.
4. Programs designed for the child should help parents manage and teach successfully; this will involve the use of practical and realistic suggestions for care, and specific examples and techniques rather than general advice. It also includes giving parents feedback about their success with their children.
5. Professionals should help parents become a part of a support group and identify the community services and resources that are available, but they must also be realistic in informing parents about lack of services. Parents need to understand that the "helping professions" cannot always help.
6. Professionals should help parents emphasize the positives in their child because so many others will be dealing with the negatives. Child-rearing is a continuous problem-solving process, and many of the difficulties exist whether a child is disabled or not. When parents begin to see this as true, they will understand that many of their skills with other children will serve them well with the child who has a disability. (p. 402)

The following demographic report on American society, for the ending of the century, gives us a clear idea of what the beginning of the twenty-first century will probably be like, and the enormous challenge that American educators will face. Let's look at the traditional American family, from 1955 to 1992. In 1955, sixty percent of households in the U.S. consisted of a traditional family (a working father and housewife mother, two or more school children). By 1985, only seven percent the U.S. households consisted of a traditional family. By 1992 only six percent of the households remained a traditional family. For each one hundred children born in 1986, the parents of forty will divorce before the children reach 18; twelve were born out of wedlock and only forty-one will reach 18, living with the two original parents. (IEL, 1989).

Public schools are now assuming more responsibility in nurturing and fostering

children. Their leadership is due to the fact that professionals and agency workers become more familiar with the many problems facing parents and children of our communities. Decker, L.E., & Gregg, G.A. (1994) wrote that:

Not so long ago, public schools first encountered children when they were five or six years old. The experiences of these little ones over the preceding preschool years were assumed to be benign and of little professional interest to teachers and administrators. Now, every educator is acutely aware of the critical importance of a child's early years, even while acknowledging that public institutions can't control everything that happens to a child between birth and kindergarten. What schools can do is help, by working with parents and families as early as possible, trying to improve family literacy and parenting skills, and building strong, positive relationships between families and schools. (p. 12)

An accessible family index showed that in 1990, 1.7 million U.S. families were formed with the birth of the first baby. Many of these families, from the start, for one or more reasons, were at risk. This risk factor indicated that the mother was under 20, the mother had not completed high school, and the parents were unmarried. According to the same sources, for the new family formed in 1990, eleven percent had all three risk factors stated above; twenty-four percent had two risk factors, and forty-five percent had at least one risk factor, (Kids Count Data Book, 1993.)

Another challenging source of statistics indicates that today twenty-three percent of all U.S. children are born outside of marriage, 15.3 million children in ninety percent of the cases live with the mother; fifty percent of them are white children living with a divorced mother; fifty-four percent of black children live with a never-married mother and thirty-two percent of Hispanic children's mothers are unmarried. It is a fact that children, ages birth to five, represent forty percent of the poor. Hodgkinson reports that the reason for childhood poverty is related to the fact that children are in single-parent,

female-headed households. The average income of a married couple with children is \$36,206, while the average income for a female-headed household with children is \$11,299. Race is an issue and poverty is an issue. Poor young women are three to four times more likely to become unmarried mothers than are affluent young women. In this context early child bearing is highly correlated with lower educational attainment and unemployment (1989).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The focus of this study is two-pronged. First, I wanted to explore the importance of families in improving a special education student's achievement. Second, it was the writer's intention to investigate various techniques used by school personnel to attract parental participation and collaboration in the school activities. The study took place in four different schools in Palm Beach County, Florida: Two elementary schools, School-A and School-C, and two high schools identified as school-B and school-D. Data include interviews and observations with special education teachers, parents, students, a school psychologist, and the study of results of exams, report card-grades, and attendance of the students involved in these programs. School-B and School-C have the regular programs and several special education programs. School-A and School-D have the same programs, and in addition to these, School-A and School-D have added the feature of The Integrated Services Model. The Integrated Services Program came to the School District of Palm Beach County (SDPBC) through a Goals 2000 Local Education Reform Grant. The project was piloted in eight schools during the 1995-96 school year. In 1997, twelve other schools joined the project. Both School-A and School-D have participated since the inception of the program in 1996 (SDPBC, Department Pupil Personnel Services, 1995). The primary concern of the program is to provide support services that meet the needs of the schools that are striving to reduce program fragmentation in student support services while seeking to expand the repertoire of skills and services offered by student support services staff (Wittwer, F., 1995). Schools that are interested in achieving these goals through an integrated

process, plan and implement a system that will enhance the capacity of classroom teachers to meet the needs of students and achieve measurable, positive outcomes for all students. In addition to that, the Integrated Services Delivery Model is one where teachers, administrators, and student' support personnel plan together in designing, developing, implementing, and sharing financial and human resources to meet a common goal (SDPBC,1996). The program features parental participation and allows both parents and school staff to create a solid partnership in educating children. It is also designed to increase a parent's participation in the student's learning activities as described in Connell's writing (Connell, J. P., 1995). Over the past ten years, it is a model for change, a major theme of national efforts, and a subject of school reform literature (Trainer's Guide, 1996). The integrated program functions within and outside schools for improving the capacity of the teachers, and helping students achieve higher academic performance (Cook, T. D., 1979). Methodology and strategies used by each participating school to gain parental participation will be detailed later in the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section focuses on relevant data and literature pertaining to the correlation of parental involvement and students' achievement.

Children with learning disabilities present a challenge for parents, educators, lawmakers, and professionals alike. Since 1960, particularly in the United States, many compensatory educational programs such as Head Start, Home Start, and other types of projects were introduced to compensate for an intellectually deprived home environment. Special education for early childhood is a different philosophy compared to compensatory education in early childhood (Keren, 1994).

Special education services or early childhood intervention services are designed to service infants and toddlers who have been diagnosed with physical or mental conditions that have a high probability of resulting in developmental delays or have already resulted in developmental delays. The developmental delay may be in the area of cognitive, physical, language, speech, psychosocial, or self-help development. In this case, family members as primary interventionists, are crucial to the success of early childhood special education (Ibid).

As Decker (1996) put it, it is crucial to involve parents in educating their children. How can educators, professionals, school personnel, and other interested groups facilitate parental involvement so that parents may play a crucial role in both home and school environments? At the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Naftchi-Ardebili Shahin presented a paper on parents' views of their

involvement with their children through the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA) Chapter 1 Programs, at home, and in school activities. The findings revealed that American mothers on the average devote less than half an hour a day talking, explaining, or reading with their children. Fathers, on the other hand, spend an average of less than fifteen minutes a day talking, explaining, reading or other related activities with their children. In this regard, parents are their children's first and most influential teachers. As Bennett (1987) put it,

What parents do to help children learn is more important to academic success than how well-off the family is. It is a well-known fact that both home and school are recognized as important factors in the sociological and educational development of children. The involvement of parents in the schools, more particularly urban schools, is part of the revival of American schools. (p.13)

The parent-school partnership movement has several well-known advocates at major university research centers, including Edward Zigler and Sharon Lynn Kagan of the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale. Each participating center or university presents a distinctive approach to the solution of the problem, but in essence each of them emphasizes the theme of providing success for all children. They promote serving the whole child: socially, academically, emotionally, and physically (Naftchi-Ardebili, S. 1995).

James Comer (1987) and his colleagues at Yale University, who have devoted a lot of time to reform schools that serve poor and minority students, argue that for school to be effective, parents must play a major role in all aspects of school life, especially the management and governance. Strong emphasis was placed on the working relationship among teachers, parents, and learners in a democratic setting.

When all those concerned do work together, then learners will succeed socially, emotionally, and academically.

At-risk children can surely benefit from strengthening the parent-school relationship because at-risk children too often perceive home and school worlds as different. In this situation, the predictable consequences are that children usually embrace the familiar home culture and reject the unfamiliar school culture, including the academic components and goals (Muriel Hmlton-Lee, 1988).

Epstein (1992) believes that schools need to know the families of their students in order to utilize the strength of the families in facilitating the student's success. The situation is more complex for the schools that serve the educationally disadvantaged, poor minority children, and the culturally diverse students and families. It is imperative that every school promote a comprehensive curriculum that includes parents' participation in educating the children.

All educators must recognize that all parents have hopes and goals for their children. The truth is that each parent differs in how he or she supports the child's efforts to achieve goals. Several studies have shown that parents' assistance at home has positive consequences for their children's achievement, attendance, and classroom behavior (Mattox, 1979). Henderson (1987) found that, at all levels, students benefit from family involvement. Flaxman (1991) stated that parental involvement improved students achievement, improved school attendance, and reduced dropout rates. Regardless of the economic, racial, or cultural background of the family, these improvements occurred.

Parent-school relationships usually invite parents to engage in school-related activities, therefore, conveying to children the importance of school and motivating them to learn strategies to deal with schools. Parents have the responsibility to expose their children to out-of-school activities such as attending museums, sporting events, and concerts (Flaxman, 1991).

Children are becoming practical learners through their own experiences. Self-development, self-esteem, knowledge, and personal growth gained from exposure to these rich environments correlate with academic achievement (West & Mild, 1994). In several studies, Epstein (1992) pointed out that family and school partnership practices are more important to children's success than family structures or descriptive characteristics, such as race, social class, level of parent education, marital status, income, language of family, family size, or age of the child.

Epstein (1992) found the stronger the school/family partnership, the less these status variables seem to explain parental behavior or children's success. Parental participation aligns home and school values and expectations and reduces the gap between them. The involvement of parents in educating their children produces several positive effects on children, teachers, and parents themselves. The commitment to schools' activities conveys the message of school importance to the children which may in turn lead to more responsible and independent behavior in school.

Hoover-Dempsey (1991) conducted studies on schools' parental participation and reported that teachers have more positive feelings about teaching in their schools when

there is more parental involvement. Also, teachers' self-confidence increases when they receive approval and appreciation from administrators, and their students' parents. This, in turn, enhances their sense of efficacy and their willingness to continue working with parents. If families are so important in the emotional and intellectual development of the child, what can schools do to enable more families, particularly those parents who are so-called hard-to-reach, to become and remain involved in their children's education?

Shahin (1995) presents some suggestions which may help to increase parental involvement in meaningful ways:

Teachers and school staff, as well as parents should be prepared for parent/school partnership. Teachers' attitudes play a large part in the academic success of at-risk children. Teachers who have low expectations for at-risk children or who believe that their parents do not care about their children, and do not want to be involved in their education, and view them as failures, will contribute to the children's failure.

Families need to feel empowered, as is the intention of Chapter I and school reform. At-risk families feel powerless. They feel inhibited from participating mostly because of their low educational attainment. These families need training to prepare them to be part of their schools decision-making groups and to be involved in Chapter I program governance.

Chapter 1 school staff, especially teachers, can play an important role in encouraging parental involvement by frequently making contact with parents and informing them about their children's needs and progress, helping parents to understand the purpose of Chapter 1 programs, and making parents aware of the importance of their role and involvement in Chapter 1 program management.

Staff should be prepared so that everyone understands the community being served. Workshops and training should be sensitive to families' needs and cultural backgrounds.

Information should be communicated to parents through various ways. It should be in a language that is understood by parents.

Providing child care, transportation, interpreters and meals could encourage greater parental participation.

Workshops and activities should be scheduled at various times and in the evening so that working parents can attend.

Topics covered in the training and workshops should meet parents' needs and have immediate application for them. When parents cannot help their children academically, they may become frustrated and feel that their attendance at Chapter 1 programs and training is not beneficial. They may then give up and leave the responsibility totally to the school to educate their children.

Parental involvement should be initiated by the school because most parents want to be involved, but either they do not know the means, or they do not know their rights. For example, in Hispanic countries of origin, the roles of parents and schools were sharply divided. Most of the low-income Hispanic parents view the U.S school system as, "a bureaucracy governed by educated non-Hispanics whom they have no right to question" (Nicolau & Ramos, 1990).

This is also true for Asian culture. They respect authorities and rarely question them because it is considered impolite. Cultural differences may be misunderstood by most school administrators and teachers who will, as a result of that misunderstanding, consider those parents uncaring about their children's education and unwilling to be involved. These parents need to be asked, and they need to be instructed about how they can help (p.16).

A Realistic View of Parents with Disabled Children

Peterson (1982) wrote that, "Both home and school have the children's interest at heart. The disparity is about the means for getting something done, not the desired for end results." It is important for parents to keep in mind that the school's goal is the same as theirs: better education for the children.

Silver (1992) wrote that the first thing parents need to know is that learning disabilities are "life" disabilities. Learning disabilities are not just school problems. The same learning disabilities that interfere with reading, writing, and arithmetic interfere with baseball, basketball, jump rope, setting the dinner table, getting dressed, and

keeping a room neat. In other words, the problem affects every aspect of life. Parents need to realize that a child's learning disability also explains why there are so many problems at home or with peers. Parents need to be realistic in their thinking and know that their child's brain somehow functions differently, whether he or she is with family, with friends, or at school.

Silver, L.B. (1992) a professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University School of Medicine goes on to say it is important to keep in mind that a learning disability is a "life time" disability. The child with the learning disability will become the adolescent with the learning disability, and will become the adult with the learning disability. If the child receives the right help at the right time, the child will get better. Apparently, if parents face reality, they have a better chance to deal with the problem. He reported that forty percent of the children with learning disabilities inherit the disorder from their parents. The problem runs in families to a point that the parents may have the same problem. It is most important to note that if students with disabilities receive the right help, and they acquire the right skills and strategies for learning, depending on the severity of the disability, they can do as well as other student.

Many teachers have experienced frustration when, attempting to involve parents in school activities, they get little response. When parents do not come to conferences, check homework, or answer notes, teachers feel no satisfaction. These types of experiences lead them to conclude that these parents do not care for their children or give little importance to education. In reality, most parents care a great deal for the education of their children. What is hard to understand is that many parents do not

always show the evidence of their caring by attending school conferences or school-sponsored events (Brown, 1989). Thompson (1992) made the following remarks:

We have reconfirmed the fact that poor people care just as much about their children as middle-income families; that poor people are not stupid. If you ask them to become involved but don't give them any real decisions to make, they're no more likely to become involved than you would be under that circumstance. But if you ask people to become involved and give them a chance to make a real difference in their school, then they respond in great numbers and they stick with it, and they begin to make a difference. (p. 5)

According to Weinberg (1990) most parents are interested in meaningful collaboration with schools. Often, teachers carry the assumption that parents who do not participate in children's education are unconcerned. Chances are these parents would like very much to be part of their children's education.

In reality, single parents, low-income parents, and working parents are willing to devote as much time as middle-class parents helping their children (Epstein, 1984). Research shows that when schools reach out to these parents, they usually embrace the idea of helping and participating in their children's education. As soon as teachers engage themselves in helping parents to help their children, low-income parents can be as effective as middle-class parents (Chavkin & Williams, 1993).

The survey conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory estimated that 95 percent of 1,188 African-American and Latino parents had the desire to be more involved with their children's education, to help with homework, and to be more present in the school. Ninety-seven percent claimed that they wanted to cooperate with their children's teachers.

They also offered strong support for school performances, helping children with homework, and assisting in school events (Chavkin and Williams, 1993).

A dilemma that school personnel often faces with disadvantaged parents is that they are reluctant to cooperate with teachers and to be responsive to teachers' positive expressions of concern and interest even when the parents have received little communication from the school and are apprehensive about asking for clarification.

Peterson (1982) observed the situation and shared the following point of view:

Parents are in love with their children.
Parents and children are one (an emotional bond).
Parents want to touch with their children's lives.
Parents want to participate.
They have a need to be useful.
They are glad when they are guided into ways of serving.
Parents have much to give. (p. 6)

Because parents want to see their children succeed, they are more likely interested in participating in their children's education. That mean they want to work with the schools in at least three areas. First, they want to know what is going on in school, and how their children are doing. Second, they want to know how the school system works, and in what way their participation is useful. Third, they want to know how they can contribute at home so that children can succeed in school, and in life (ECS, 1988).

Ample research points to evidence that either low-income or less-educated parents can contribute to their children's education. Lack of knowledge about how to contribute does not need to be equated with lack of interest. The emphasis is that many parents do not have the knowledge of how to translate their care and concern into positive involvement.

Factors that Hold Back Parents Involvement

According to Freedman (1989) five major factors hold back the involvement of some parents:

1. Time and child care constraints.
It is difficult for working parents to attend school events that are scheduled during the work day. Responsibilities for childcare often prevent them from participating in programs held at school.
2. Negative experiences with schools.
Parents who were unsuccessful or had a stressful experience with their own school may be reluctant to re-enter school setting. These parents often avoid any interaction with their children's school.
3. School practices that do not accommodate the diversity of families served.
School representative that conveys the attitude that under involved families do not care about the education of their children. When they do participate, their participation does not influence decision making.
4. School that does not support cultural diversity. Parent whose language is not the language of the majority may be uncomfortable in schools that do not specifically value linguistic background and cultural diversity.
5. The primacy of basic needs.
Many families suffer extreme economic stress, addressing their own food, clothing, and shelter needs takes precedence over involvement in their children's schooling. (p. 14)

The U.S. Department of Education lists four barriers that prevent parents from fully participating in the education of their children: Lack of time, uncertainty about what to do, cultural differences, and the lack of a supportive environment (Renee White-Clark, 1996).

Actually, parental involvement is popularized around the country. Parents of disabled children and other advocate individuals form groups to develop and educate parents of their importance in educating their children. During the elementary and

middle school years, the needs for a child with disabilities center on acquiring appropriate academic, social, community access, and self-management skills. Family members must cope with a wide array of educational and related services personnel on behalf of their children with a disability and, at the same time, care for the needs of all members of the family (Alper and Schloss, 1996).

Advocacy Models and Strategies

Before the establishment of special education as a formal discipline, families of students with disabilities had constantly advocated for effective educational services. The efforts of these advocate people have resulted in many positive outcomes, including the passage of several acts of legislation such as The American with Disabilities Act of 1990, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, and the placement of children in inclusive settings, which is more direct placement compared to mainstream or least restrictive environment. However, It is important to point out two important features about children with disabilities. Turnbull and Turnbull (1990) were the first to recognize that not just the person with the disability, but the entire family needs service and support. In this situation, families, not professionals, primarily decide what specific resources and services they need. Second, realizing that the roles and needs of children with disabilities and their family members evolve and change over time. The elementary and secondary schools offer challenging opportunities for the child with disabilities to learn academic skills, discover a variety of services in the community, engages in social interactions, and develop friendship. The need for parents to work with professionals increases. The child with a disability may

have brothers or sisters attending the same school or even the same class. Because of the dynamic and reciprocal nature of the family system at each stage in the cycle of life, one must consider the needs of the members of the entire family.

Throughout the lifespan, many children with disabilities are faced with needs. Needs for an adequate residence, specialized equipment, and medical services are examples. Other needs surface as the child's developmental stages increase. Physical, intellectual, and social needs continue to develop through the age and may be broadly categorized into four areas according to Sandra Alper (1995): Academic skills, community access, social skills for the child to appropriately manage sexual development and maturity, and social skills and friendship. Note, that the academic skills targeted for instruction will depend on the strengths and weaknesses of the individual.

Children with learning disabilities may possess tremendous ability in certain areas. For example, they may have very good aptitude for mathematics but struggle in reading. Whether the student functions poorly in an area, his or her skills can be brought up to an accepted level when the right methods for instruction are used. Erikson (1963) explained the eight psychosocial stages of ego development as part of the process by which all individuals establish basic orientations to themselves and their social world. He recognized that each stage had a positive and a negative component and those stages were critical steps "of decision between progression and regression, integration and retardation" (Herwig, 1976, p. 72).

The role that educators assume in establishing a relationship with parents is one

that places educators as instruments for change. They must use themselves to nurture and assist learners to change and grow. Educators must wear two hats in relationship to learning one as a professional educator and another as an agent of change (Ibid).

CHAPTER THREE

Design of the Study

The topic I have explored is best suited to a qualitative research approach. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the purpose of a qualitative study is to accumulate sufficient knowledge to lead to understanding. They also suggest the use of an emergent research design, which means that data collection and data analysis are simultaneous. Ongoing activities allow for important understanding to be discovered along the way and they are pursued in additional data collection efforts.

Methodology

I conducted the qualitative research with teachers, students, parents, and principals of four different schools in Palm Beach County, Florida. School-A and School-D received services from the Integrated Service Delivery Model which is designed to assist schools and districts that are striving to reduce program fragmentation in student support services and to expand their repertoire of skills and services offered by teachers and students services staff. School-B and School-C functioned under the normal district curriculum, with special education classes and other related programs, and are not taking part in the Integrated Service Delivery Model.

Methods of Collecting Data

In the study, I used a variety of methods of data collection to achieve better results and to increase the credibility of the findings. I used the following data collecting strategies:

Interviews

One important way to understand parental involvement and the relationship with student achievement is to listen to the voices of experienced people who work with families: school psychologist, parent, special education teachers, and the ESE coordinators. These people are familiar with cases that require parental participation and decision making. They are also the professionals who have insights through knowing the child and his/her behaviors. Through letters and telephone calls (see Appendix A), at least four varying exceptionality teachers, and a psychologist-parent of a child with a learning disability, who worked with students from pre-kindergarten to high schools for twenty-one years, agreed to share with the writer their experiences in dealing with parents and children. The writer used a questionnaire (see Appendix B) to gather data which later were reconstructed in a “recognizable reality” for those people who have participated in the study. In Patton’s words, “The fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which the respondents can express their own understandings in their own terms (Maykut, 1996, p. 97).” The information collected was compared and contrasted as Maykut suggested, in order to measure the involvement of parents in educating their children. Noted that two of the participating schools (school-A and school-D) are linked to the Integrated Services Delivery Model and two other schools (school-B and School-C) have not received the Integrated Services.

Review of Documents

The writer believes that documentation of any sort will offer great opportunities to understanding parental involvement because it can be used to capture reality and add detail at information to the phenomenon under investigation. The writer has observed and reviewed all documentation that may be helpful, such as notes, behavior documents, tests, text, and report cards. These documents were reviewed, and the writer took notes with the intent to discover salient aspects of parental involvement.

Participant Observation

As the study focuses on interviewing and observing and gathering evidence which may mark the importance of families' involvement in educating their children with special needs, it was important for the writer to understand the lives of people on his own terms by spending considerable amount of time with them in the natural setting (Morehouse, 1996). As the investigation started, the writer entered the classroom, school playground, school cafeteria, school hallway, and portable to observe, learn, and discover the phenomenon under study. The writer wanted to know what was in the lives and experience of instructors, as well as students that may bring understanding to the study. It was also important to know what role those instructors played in the lives of the students and the families of the students. Cultural anthropologists, historically, have developed and refined the method of qualitative data collection called participant observation. The participant observer attempts to enter the life of others to indwell and expend as much as possible his or her own way of viewing the world (Ibid). Interviews and observations conducted during the study were detailed in the next chapters.

Setting: School-A

The elementary school-A is located in a neighborhood ranging from low to medium income families. The population of School-A consists of 1088 students. The school is composed of 10 percent Black, 70 percent White, 19 percent Hispanic and 1 percent other. The school has 49.9 percent of student body on free or reduced lunch. The faculty has 64 teachers, 1 guidance counselor, 1 principal and 1 assistant principal; the faculty is comprised of 13.3 percent Black, 82.3 percent White, and 4.4 percent Hispanic. The school participates in the Integrated Service Delivery Model program. The original building constructed in 1970, contains 18 classrooms in a modified open-space area. In 1974, nineteen additional classroom areas were constructed. Additional space was made available through the use of portable classrooms. In 1991, a new addition provided space for 4 regular classrooms and 5 special education classrooms. The construction is new and attractive, except for several portables in the back of the school. Part of the original building was renovated. In addition to the regular programs, School-A offers seven Chapter I classes, two Drop-out Prevention classes, two Trainable Mentally Handicapped classes, four Educable Mentally handicapped classes, one Emotional Handicapped class, and four Specific Learning Disabilities classes. Students with speech or language impairments are served by three Speech/Language Pathologists.

Setting: School-B

The Secondary School-B is located in a community of low to medium income families. The population of the school is 2,175 students. The student body is composed

of 38 percent Black, 10 percent Hispanic, 50 percent Caucasian, and 2 percent Asian. Twenty percent of the student body is on free and reduced lunch. The faculty of 113 teachers, 6 guidance counselors, 1 principal and 6 assistant principals, is composed of 71 percent White, 23 percent Black, and 6 percent Hispanic. The school is affected by the Integrated Service Delivery Model and a Parent Advisory Counsel, which meets on a monthly basis. Besides the regular programs, School-B offers seven Cities in Schools (drop out prevention) classes, five reading classes, one Educable Mentally Handicapped class, two Emotionally Handicapped classes, one Severely and Emotionally Handicapped class, three part-time Specific Learning Disabilities classes, four full-time Specific Learning Disabilities classes, and one itinerant speech and language class. The school opened in January 1989, as a state of the art senior high school complex, replacing two old high schools. The facility consists of an academic wing with 64 classrooms, which include science and computer laboratories, an administrative wing with 27 additional classrooms, a physical education complex, a little theater, a lecture hall, a performing and fine arts center, a vocational/technical education wing, and a full service cafeteria (source school improvement plan, 1995-96). The buildings are fairly new and they are well painted. They look fresh and attractive. In the rear of the buildings, there are several portables. The school is completely fenced, with a main entrance and two other gates which were built to access the main buildings and the portables. The classrooms are carpeted and cleaned, with comfortable chairs, students' desks and a computer desk. During activities, students are very well accommodated in the media center which is located in the north side of

the main building. School police were present on the campus. The writer saw a student escorted by the school police officer. The student was screaming, yelling, and crying compulsively. On the football field, several students were playing and shoving each other.

Setting: School-C

The elementary School-C has an enrollment of 750 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The population is composed of 78 percent Black, 14 percent White, 6 percent Hispanic and 2 percent others. Eighty-one percent of the students received free or reduced lunch. The racial and economic balance reflects the parental population. The faculty consists of fifty-two teachers, eighteen are special education teachers, one guidance counselor, one special education coordinator, an assistant principal, and a principal. Seventy-nine percent of the teachers are White, 16 percent are Black, and Hispanic 5 percent. The school was built in 1961, previously as a junior high school. The original six buildings are inadequate compared to other elementary schools in the district. Two new buildings were added to the school. One is used for kindergarten through first grade and the second building is used for art and music. There are thirty-six classrooms, an administrative office, computer lab, and a media center. There are four portable classrooms housing one Pre-Kindergarten Early Intervention class, one Pre-Kindergarten (ESE) class, an Art center and one Educable Mentally Handicapped class. The exceptional student education program is composed of the following: Three Educable Mentally Handicapped classes, two Part-time Specific Learning Disabilities classes, one Full-time Specific Learning Disability class, three

Pre-Kindergarten classes, two Language Learning Disabilities classes, a Kindergarten and Speech Resource center. In addition to that, the school has three Chapter I teachers serving the first, and third grades.

Setting: School-D

The fifteen hundred member student body of School-D is composed of 27 percent Black, 40 percent White, 31 Percent Hispanic, and 2 percent other. Thirty-five percent of the student body is on free or reduced lunch. School-D has a faculty of ninety-seven teachers, four guidance counselors, one principal and four assistant principals. The faculty is comprised of 13 percent Black, 78 percent White, and 8 percent Hispanic. The school offers regular programs, English Speaker of Other Languages, Emotionally Handicapped as a Second Language, and Specific Learning Disability programs. The facility includes fifty-five classrooms, four computer labs and thirteen portables.

The following chart includes students' populations and teachers for each school in the setting:

POPULATION

	School-A	School-B	School-C	School-D
Population	1,088	2,175	750	1,502
Teacher	64	113	52	97

Despite of the differences in population, it was interesting to note that every targeted special education classroom has thirteen students.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis

The approach that the writer used to analyze data for this research was Strauss and Corbin's (1990) second approach to data analysis. The primary concern of the researcher in this approach was to describe and reconstruct the data in "recognizable reality" for people who have participated in the study. Through this approach, the researcher had the opportunity to weave descriptions, speaker words, fieldnote quotations, and present his own interpretation into a rich and believable descriptive narrative. The writer interviewed and observed four teachers, a psychologist who is a parent, a former ESE coordinator, who is now a VE teacher, parents and students. The information collected was reconstructed, interpreted and analyzed.

As the purpose of this study was, first, to know to what extent, the academic performance of a special education student increases through parental involvement, and second, to know about various techniques used by school personnel to attract parental participation and collaboration in school activities; to accomplish this work, the writer conducted a qualitative data analysis. The rationale of a qualitative research method, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest, is to accumulate sufficient knowledge to lead to understanding the phenomenon under investigation. The following are the beliefs, opinions, and experiences that people shared with the observer participant.

The setting of this study took place in four different schools. School-A and School-D received the Integrated Services while School-B and School-C emphasized the general curriculum activities. Due to confidentiality, schools have not been identified by names.

Within-Site Analysis

Observation /Classroom Environment

School-A

School-A is one of the two schools that received services from the Integrated Services Project. The classroom that the writer observed, was a special education class with varying exceptionalities, located in the northwest side of building- A with a door open to the main hallway. The teacher, Miss-A, is trained and certified in varying exceptionalities. She has a Master's Degree in Special Education. She has thirteen students, seven with specific learning disabilities (SLD), four mentally handicapped (EMH) and two emotionally handicapped (EH). The teacher's desk is at the left corner of the room facing the children, along with the teacher's desk is a long table, where students and the teacher discuss math problems. Three computers are also on a table adjacent to the room for the students use on a merit basis. Three to five feet from the computers there is another table used for reading. According to the teacher, an overhead projector is often used for class lessons. A green board and poster board are also in the classroom. The classroom is well decorated with posters, including messages which communicate to the students the expected behavior in the classroom. Specific rules were posted on the wall regarding students behavior. A few of them are: keep your hands and property to yourself, respect others, and the school property, raise hands and wait for your turn before asking questions. Miss-A provides ample praise and rewards. She makes certain that she acknowledges good or improved behavior. She uses direct instruction to teach the class. She speaks with a normal

tone of voice, so students in the back row could easily understand. She tries to gain students' attention by hand sign or eye contact before teaching.

Interview School-A

The writer continued exploring data with Teacher-A of School-A. (Questions from interview with Teacher-A, Appendix A). Teacher-A's background is in special education. Currently, she teaches fourth grade students with varying exceptionalities as specified in the classroom environment section of this paper. It is very interesting to observe the wide range of abilities and different characteristics of same-age students. The most important thing for her is to meet the unique needs of each student while providing a safe and healthy environment.

Students in her class are provided a variety of materials for learning. Manipulative and "hands-on" strategies for implementation are used; paper-pencil tasks are also encouraged. Other strategies for the daily uses of computers and evaluations are also performed in different ways: teacher-prepared tests, observation, portfolio assessment, commercial assessment devices, curriculum-based assessment, etc. Students learn in whole-group, small-group, and individual settings.

It is very important to note that Teacher-A makes home visitations to the parents of her students. She believes that by doing so the relationship between parents, students, and the school develops more efficiently. At the beginning of each school year, she begins to get parents involved. She sends letters, makes phone calls, and does home visits. Parents are named as responsible parties on IEP objectives. She takes steps in offering to "coach" parents in learning strategies that may help their

children. Another important step in the parental involvement process is that Teacher-A recognizes that, sometimes, behavior programs have to be a collaborative effort between teachers and parents. She urges and encourages parents to set up appropriate study space at home, establish routines with a set time for studying, reviewing and checking completed homework. Because of the groundwork laid by Teacher-A, during the 1996-1997 school year the ratio of parental involvement was as follow: Individual Education Plan conferences (IEP) nine out of thirteen parents attended, one out of thirteen parents attended the Parent Teacher Association meeting (PTA), one out of thirteen also responded to classroom invitation and one out of thirteen participated on school-A field trips.

During the investigation, the writer noticed that each participated school in the study developed some form of parent involvement group. They may differ in their approach to gain parental participation, but in general all of them were interested in bringing parents to school.

Teacher-A outlines different ways of communicating with willing parents: Newsletters, flyers, brochures, parenting workshops, numerous PTA activities, parent visitation days, etc. Parents are always encouraged to come to the school for lunch with their child. In a continuing effort to improve ways to involve parents in the educational process, School-A forms parent groups and gets other community people to participate. A number of ESOL classes are housed at School-A and in January, they started adult ESOL classes two evenings each week. Child care was badly needed, but no budget was available. They were able to recruit enough teacher volunteers to

teach language activities and computer skills to the children of the adult students. Kindergarten teachers go into the community and present “Make and Take” workshops for parents of pre-kindergarten children. Another teacher who is trained as a parent facilitator teaches functional skills to parents. Multicultural activities are planned throughout the school year. The writer admires the school’s effort to bring parents to school to participate in the learning process. However, the tools used by School-A are not too different compared to other schools in the study.

Teacher-A explained, “It is, of course, not possible to accommodate all working and single parents. Parental input is encouraged; and conferences, activities, and special events are planned at different times so more parents can attend school functions.”

Parents are contacted by phone and written communication. Spanish and Creole facilitators who interpret both verbal and written messages are available at the school site. Miss-A stated, “School information is sent home in three languages. Messages are communicated in a timely manner. Every effort is made to contact parents of all students.”

In the same manner, teachers and parent groups are representatives on the School Advisory Council and PTA board at School-A.

Teacher-A experienced that students react in different ways when parents are present. She expressed, “It is not with great surprise that the worst behaved child suddenly becomes angelic.” She claimed that, “Most elementary age students are proud to have their parents in the school. They like their parents to be involved in school activities, it makes them feel special and cared for.”

At this point, the writer sought to know how Miss-A felt about parents signing the consent form? She was not sure which "consent form" the writer referred to. The interviewer explained that, there is a Procedural Due Process Consent Form that must be signed by parents of all special education students. It is a principle which assures fairness in the process of evaluating and placing a disabled child into appropriate education programs. The school and the parents of this child must follow certain procedures which, in most cases, evolve around keeping this parent informed and gaining his/her consent for any school-related activities affecting his/her child. Teacher A explained that she has a son who is both mentally and physically handicapped so she has empathy for parents of special-needs children. Decisions have to be made on an intellectual, rather than an emotional basis. The special program is being described to the parents in the meeting and the consent form then sign and sometimes after the meeting the teacher would invite them to observe a classroom session. The interviewer asked Miss-A to explain the program she had referred to. She replied, "Usually an individual education plan designed by a team of experts, and implemented by the classroom teacher and other educators." Most parents want to do what is best for the child and they are not reluctant to sign the form. Occasionally, a parent will refuse to sign which, of course, is their legal right. Eventually, the parent usually requests the special program. A larger problem exists when a parent insists on a special program when the child doesn't qualify.

When asked the question, "Does the academic performance of a special education student increase through parental involvement?" Teacher-A responded by saying, "In

the general student population, yes, parental involvement does affect achievement. However, when students have handicapping conditions, it is difficult to know which factors influence academic achievement. Parents often become frustrated when they try to tutor a mentally handicapped child at home. The learning process is very slow. Teaching self-help and daily living skills is difficult enough. Parental involvement is definitely a factor where behavior is concerned.” She added that she would like to see every parent make a commitment to “. . . spend quality time with the child every day. Read with the child daily. Sit down to a family dinner each evening and listen to each other. Assist the child with homework whenever needed. Provide a safe and loving home life. Visit the classroom once a month (or more). Learn to use ‘Discipline with Dignity techniques’. “ However, Miss-A did indicate some factors that seemed to correlate with parental involvement such as, “. . . Motivation, value of education, appropriate social behaviors, regular school attendance, and respect for authority figures. In the general population, these factors would probably lead to higher academic achievement. The same results may not occur in the special-needs population.”

Observation /Classroom Environment

School-B

School-B has not received services from the Integrated Services Program. The writer began his journey by exploring data with Mr.B at School-B. The classroom was a special education classroom with varying exceptionalities, located in the northeast corner of the administrative building with a door open to the main hallway. The instructor has a Master's Degree in Education with certification in varying exceptionalities. He has nine years of teaching experience. He has thirteen students, four with specific learning disabilities (SLD), four mentally handicapped (EMH) and five emotionally handicapped (EH). The classroom is decorated with the students' work. Various disciplinary messages were hanged in the classroom which communicate to the students the expected behavior in the classroom. Specific rules were posted on the wall regarding students' behavior. Some of them are: Keep hands, feet and all other objects to yourself, be a good friend and student, no name calling, teasing or talking back, follow direction the first time, etc. The teacher's desk is at the far end center of the room facing the students, and a table where the teacher consulted with the students one on one. Two computers are also available in the room for the students' use on a merit basis, At the left hand corner of the computer table is another table used for reading. He relates that a T.V. and VCR are also available. A chalkboard and a bulletin board are also in the classroom.

Mr.B provides ample praise and rewards. He makes certain that he acknowledges good and improved behavior. He uses direct instruction to teach the class. He speaks

with a normal tone of voice, so students in the back row can hear and follow his directions. As with teacher A, Teacher B tries to gain students' attention by hand sign or eye contact before teaching.

Interview School-B

Teacher-B presented his life's story by stating "The most important part of my job has always been the students." He used to be an ESE contact at a large high school in Palm Beach County, Florida. He knows what it means to deal with Special Education parents. He argues that dealing with parents is one part of the job, but the most important is to help the students to achieve academic performance. He explains some strategies by instituting a case arrangement system where each student is directly responsible for his or her work. He monitors progress at least once a month with each participating student. As he explains, he has done all that to enhance the students' academic performance. Mr.B explains, "To communicate with parents, we use letters, frequent phone calls, and even ask students to help us involve their parents. We often send letters, in the parents' native language or we use language facilitators to assist with phone calls. We do not hesitate to call parents at work. We make repeat phone calls and even ask the students to tell their parents how important their involvement is to them." Mr.B continued, "It is rare that parents of ESE students in my school visit classrooms. Depending on the exceptionality of the student, the reactions are different. For lower functioning students (i.e. EMH), the students are excited when their parents come in." There were also some differences encountered with school-B that are important to point out.

When asked about the differences between parents of elementary students compared with parents of high school students, Mr.B stated that “I have very rarely had a parent who would not sign a consent form. I find that by high school, parents who may have been resistant to signing, are now eager to find out why their child is having trouble and will now look for any answer to help them. When I used to work in elementary school, I found much more resistance from parents. Many had a hard time facing the fact that their ‘baby’ might have a problem. By high school, that changes.”

Mr.B had his own views on parental involvement for the academic success of special student education. He recognized that there are some connections between academic success and parental involvement. This does not manifest itself as much in school as it does at home. He gives an example, “A student might be missing some assignments or slacking off. A phone call home to an involved parent very often causes an immediate change in the student.” He also related that, “Where parent involvement is evident is in the behavior. Students whose parents are more involved are usually not behavior problems in school.”

The feeling of Teacher-B for letting parents enter and visit the classroom is very positive. Attending IEP meetings and visiting the classroom are the types of involvement that Teacher-B likes to see take place. He believes such activities can make a difference for both teacher and student.

Observation/Classroom Environment

School-C

School-C has not received services from The Integrated Services Program. Miss-C is a trained teacher with five years of experience. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Education, and she is also certified in varying exceptionalities. Her classroom is located in the "B" wing of the school. The door faces the hallway, it has thirteen full-time students and two students who come to the classroom for language arts and reading instruction. The classroom is well decorated with posters, including messages which communicate to the students the expected behavior in the classroom. Specific rules were posted on the wall regarding the expected behavior of students. A few of them are, "Keep hand, feet and all other objects to yourself. Raise a nice, quiet hand. Be a good friend and student, No name calling, teasing or talking back." The teacher's desk is at the left corner of the room facing the students. There is also a table where the students and an aid worked on reading and letter formation. At the left corner, at the entrance of the classroom, sitting on the table are three computers for the students' use. Not too far from the computers is another table used for the teacher and students to discuss problems. A chalk board and a bulletin board are also in the classroom. All "happy faces" get to pick from the bag at the end of the day. Happy grams to parents. Extra free time. Participation in "Fun Friday". Verbal praise.

Interview School-C

The writer continued his journey by examining data with Teacher-C of Elementary School-C. One thing the writer noticed was that every varying exceptional classroom contained 13 students. Teacher-C explained that teaching is challenging and the most important part of her job is to insure that students experience success in their academics. The writer was very interested in seeing the kind of strategies and motivation that this teacher used to help the students be successful in their academics.

As the investigation continued, Teacher-C declared that, "Constant modification and intensive one-on-one instruction of individualized skills enable my students to improve their academic performance." The writer noted that this strategy was not used by other schools in the study.

Teacher-C explained that she sends home daily progress notes and denotes students' strengths/weaknesses. This is another strategy which is not being used by other targeted schools in the study. She stated that she, "makes phone calls throughout the year to ensure that parents are aware of the students progress."

She confirms the statement that parental involvement in educating children increases academic performance. "Yes my students whose parents are involved do better academically because: 1) They turn in more assignments 2) They get extra help at home 3) They take more pride in their work because they know Mom/Dad will see it."

She recommends that more parents participate in the IEP process.

Observation/Classroom Environment

School-D

The writer observed a special education High School class of thirteen full-time students with varying exceptionalities. The teacher of this class is a trained teacher with fourteen years of experience in teaching middle and secondary students. She has a Master's Degree in Special Education and she is also a writer. Her classroom which is a portable is fairly clean, well decorated and looked fresh. The students, for most of the time of the observation, remained seated and participated in all the classroom activities. Several posters were hanging on the walls with messages which communicate to the students the expected behavior in the classroom. The teacher's desk is at the left corner parallel to the student's desks. The classroom only has one computer. No overhead projector or extra reading table were identified at time the observer visited the classroom. However, Teacher-D said that an overhead projector can be provided upon request.

Interview School-D

Teacher-D made a point by showing appreciation for the affective domain. She said she must meet each student where she or he is at each day and meet their affective needs first, before she can attempt academics. She argued that, "if a child is sullen or acting out of the ordinary that day I go to his /her desk and ask what is bothering him/her. I have heard so many tales, mostly involving crimes they have been accused of and impending trials and jail time. It is only after I have helped them work them through these issues emotionally that I pursue academics with them. When they cease

to be preoccupied with their daily disasters then their academic performance automatically improves.” She appears to have compassion for students who are experiencing problems in their lives. Teacher-D makes it clear that many of her students are from deprived homes.

It is a common pattern in today’s society that many of the school children live with older siblings, grandma, foster care, and group homes. As teacher-D expressed, “One student’s mother is currently in Chicago for two to three months. The seventeen-year-old student works five days a week and is sharing the house with a twenty-three-year-old brother who got out of jail last week.” “Another student’s mother was shot and killed two months ago.” The writer wanted to know if this student does well academically: Teacher-D replied, “Confidentiality should be kept for the benefit of the student.” She is not willing to disclose or show any evidence of the student’s work. The writer believed the teacher’s report is true due to observations and the accuracy of her conversation during the interview.

In a desire to explore more knowledge of the subject matter, the writer interviewed a Palm Beach County School Board psychologist who works with students ages three to twenty-one and a parent from each target school referred to as Parent A of Elementary School-A, Parent B of High School-B, Parent C of Elementary School-C, and Parent D of High School-D.

Interview with Psychologist

He has worked as a school psychologist for twenty-two years, and he is also the parent of a son with a specific learning disability. The psychologist explained his

experience and involvement with the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) child as a critical issue.

He pointed out several factors that allow the child the best chance to reach his potential by saying that, "First, and perhaps the most important is for the parent to provide a solid supportive base for his/her child. The parent needs to treat the child as a person of worth and dignity, especially in the area of intelligence. Some parents upon hearing that their child has a learning disability begin to think the child is 'not smart'. This of course is not true, but the parent sees that the child is not learning and mistakenly equates this with intelligence. In reality the SLD child has significantly higher intelligence than his/her achievement. The student's achievement is low because of process deficits that interfere with learning, not because of low intelligence. The wise parent understands that the child has good intelligence and treats him as 'smart'."

He continued to say that, "The child who is treated as capable (smart) will have a better chance to have a good self concept. Positive feelings of self-worth and ability to achieve are essential to success at academics and life. These parents find things that the child can do well and then praise them for these activities." He mentioned John F. Kennedy had a learning disability. His father treated him as a person of worth, dignity and expected positive things from his son. The father found positive activities John did and praised him. "As all know, JFK became a president of the United States."

Parent-A

Parent-A has a child who had just completed his first year in a Specific Learning Disability class. Miss A shared with the interviewer that her child greatly benefited from the program because he was struggling in a regular education class and could not keep up with the teacher's assignments. After her child had been tested and placed in a full time SLD program, she noticed that her son improved greatly, especially in the areas of reading and spelling. At this point the writer inquired about how the school develops relationship's with parents. She replied, "The school always contacts me regarding my son's academic progress, homework assignments, and for any change in my son's academic achievement." She believes that her participation encourages both the teacher and her son to cooperate and work toward the academic goal. However, she explained that her knowledge regarding the school curriculum is not adequate to accurately evaluate the entire program; therefore, she can only judge the success of the program by the achievement of her son.

Parent-B

Parent-B expressed that her child has struggled in school for several years. After trying tutoring, then having her child tested and gaining information about her child's strengths and weaknesses, she agreed to place the child in a Specific Learning Disability class. She added that the special class has built up the child's self-esteem, which had been lost through the years of struggling. At this point, Parent-B realized that her child has seen herself begin to succeed at her school work, which has totally changed her attitude, confidence level, and her self-esteem. Her child had put up walls

toward subjects she had experienced failure in and now finds those subjects “easy” or is at least motivated to make a good effort in them. Parent-B continued to acknowledge the improvement and the progress of her daughter. She related, “My daughter is seeing the results! She has proof that she can do the work, because her grades and her attitude have improved greatly. She now feels more comfortable and independent.”

At the end, Parent-B expressed her appreciation to the school and the teachers for helping her to be an active participant in her daughter’s academic achievement. She enjoyed being a participant in school activities and stated that she much appreciates the “open door policy” toward parent participation that the school embraced and is looking forward to learning more about strategies to help her daughter. “I can’t say enough about how much the special education class has helped my daughter”

Parent-C

Parent-C has a child who has attended a Specific Learning Disability class for two years. She believes in giving her son an opportunity to be able to understand the subject matter in the classroom. At the beginning she was not interested in participating in any school activities except at the school’s request. After realizing that her son had difficulty with the subject matter, she decided to take an active part by working with her son’s teachers. As a result, she became acquainted with many activities set up to help parents with children with disabilities. From that time on, her son’s self-esteem improved greatly. He has learned to put forth effort and has learned

that he can do the work, where before, his confidence was such that he did not always believe he could accomplish it. By participating in different school activities, Parent-C has learned strategies to help her son compensate for his learning differences.

Parent-D

The writer's interview with Parent-D was very interesting. She claimed that she was unaware of the different types of learning disabilities until her daughter displayed reading difficulties. She was tested and was found to be reading three years below her grade level. At that time, she was invited to discuss an individual education plan that would best suit her daughter's learning style. She found that School-D has rich curriculum activities for parents. She decided to actively involve herself for the benefit of her daughter and herself. The school has provided an opportunity for her to ask questions and provided an environment where she feels free to express her needs for help. She also enjoyed the small group interaction that her daughter is receiving help from.

Interview with students

The writer also interviewed a student from School A and this is what he said, "I feel that my teacher is there to help me, I get help whenever I need it. My mother also no longer blames me for not having a passing grade." Another student from School B reported that, "I enjoyed the small group interaction better than one-on-one tutoring. I do not feel isolated from my friends. I still participated in several activities of the school general curriculum. A student from School C reported that, "the special class helped me to become more independent, more responsible, and more confident. I feel that I

am not the only one struggling academically.”

A student from School-D stated that he feels good about himself and his academic performance. He stated that he is planning to go to college after his graduation.

Cross-Site Analysis

The cross-site analysis section emphasized similarities and differences found in participants during observations and interviews for this study.

Readers need to keep in mind that School-A and School-D received services from the Integrated Services Delivery Model while School-C and School-B were not part of the Integrated Services Delivery Model.

The focus of inquiry was:

First, to what extent the academic performance of a special education student increases through parental involvement.

Second, to know about various techniques used by school personnel to attract parental participation and collaboration in school activities.

Data collected from Miss-A and Miss-C were clear indication that both personnel's School-A and School-C went beyond the call of duty in their community to reach parents and persuade them to be part of school activities. Miss-A expressed that, "Kindergarten teachers go into the back community and present 'Make and Take' workshops for parents of Pre-kindergarten children." Miss-C in a similar situation stated that, ". . . Our 'Make and Take' workshops allow single parents to attend as we provide free babysitting."

In all four schools, parents are contacted in their native language whenever possible, and again, every effort was made to make parents feel welcome to school.

In reality, it seems normal that each institution carries out duties and activities in its own way. However, the importance of reaching out to parents in the community can

give parents a sense of partnership which will later strengthen the relationship between parents and schools in the community. The writer believes that a closer relationship between school and parents can improve the academic progress of a student. The Workshops strategies used by School-A and School-C seemed to have tremendous impact on parents and students. Miss-C confirmed that, "Students whose parents are involved do better academically because 1.) They turn in more assignments 2.) They get extra help at home 3.) They take more pride in their work because they know Mom or Dad will see it."

Seemingly, Teacher-A, Teacher-C, and Teacher-D have had a positive view on the modality of parents' signature for the "consent form." Teacher-B had, apparently, experienced a different situation when he was an instructor at an elementary school in Palm Beach County. But in general, all teachers in the study see the parental signature a strategy to win parent participation.

It is important to note that Teacher-B argued that it is rare that parents are reluctant to sign the parental "consent form". The writer noticed similar strategies had been taken place in School-A and School-C for the inclusion of parents when attempting to increase their awareness on the academic performance of a special student education. The invitation of parents to attend meetings and discuss student progress or failure was mostly done by written invitations and phone calls. Again, this ideal was common among all schools that participated in the study. Similarly, the Advisory Committee is present in most schools in the study. The School Advisory Committee is a group comprised of the school staff, and principal, and parents which deals with

various school issues. This committee was very visible in both school-A and school-B every teacher in the study indicated that parents of special education students are reluctant to participate in educating their children. Elementary School-A and Elementary School-C seemed to follow the pathway by organizing various workshops to educate parents and make them feel that the education of their children is a share activity. Holding parent conferences is very similar with what other schools have done to gain parental support. In this context the differences are in the consistency of the services offered to the parent of a disabled child. Similarly, all respondents in the study shared that, "We send home monthly newsletters and frequent flyers to convey special events." They have also emphasized the use of facilitators for parent communication. "We have a Parent Liaison on campus to help with communication. In addition, we also have a Spanish or a Creole interpreter who maintains communication and keep students and parents aware of important events."

Another important strategy that Teacher-A and Teacher-B pointed out was the use of free babysitting. They stated that, "Make & Take workshops allow parents to attend and they provide free babysitting for the single parents."

No differences were found in parent invitations to PTA meeting "We are always encouraging parental involvement through the PTO and volunteer programs." Teacher-C explained, "My school invites all parents to actively participate in their children's education. My students love it! They love to show their parents all that we're working on in our classroom."

The confidence level of Miss-A or Miss-C regarding students performance through

parental support is greater than Teacher-B and Teacher-D. Both Teacher-A and Teacher-C encouraged parents to be aware of their children's I.E.P. goals and to be an active participant in the development of the IEP.

The conception and approach of Teacher-D in dealing with students and parents are different compared to Teacher-A or Teacher-B because Teacher-D has experienced different situations with different types of students. She explained that by the time her students are Juniors or Seniors very few of them are living with a parent. Therefore, her techniques for dealing with students' problems are also different.

All teachers in the study showed interest in sharing educational responsibility with parents. Even though each teacher used different words, they all conveyed the message that, "We need the participation of all kinds of parents in educating the school children." A few statements expressed by some teachers in the study may bring understanding. Teacher-A claimed that parents must be named as responsible parties in the IEP objectives while Teacher-D expressed that parents must share in the IEP process. These statements indicated that those teachers had experienced strong feeling for parents to be partners in educating their children. The words used by either Teacher-A or Teacher-D were different but the contents of their message were the same. All of them affirmed a positive and common attitude toward parental involvement.

None of the four students that the writer interviewed conveyed any negative messages toward the special education classes that they attended. However, they exhibited certain similarities and differences which are normal because each of the students has received instruction from the SLD teacher using his/her own learning

strategy. Student B seemed unique because she had received tutoring prior to being placed in a special education program. She stated that tutoring had been after a day full of frustration, difficulty and discouragement. Now that she is in special education class school is much better. The class is a resource for her during the school day and a supportive place for her to go. The specific learning disability class has met her need for one-on-one instruction, which she needs.

All four students interviewed in the study reported that they built up their self-esteem through their special education classes. Similarly, all four parents enjoyed the special education classes that their children are attending. They stated that their participation contributed a lot to the academic and social development of their children. All four parents stated that they would like to give their children an opportunity to succeed academically. They also realized that their involvement would be greatly beneficial for their children and also themselves. All of them have given the impression that struggles with academic subjects overwhelmed and frustrated the learner. During the writer's interview with the parents, he has noticed that the parents were unaware of Integrated Services Delivery Model in School A or School B, but all of them indicated that the schools have improved the quality services offered to parents in their communities.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES

The outcomes of the study were significant for both high schools and elementary schools. The development of the outcomes in this study followed Maykut's advice: "Talk less and let the research participants talk more (Maykut, 1996)."

Based on observations and interviews of four teachers and a school psychologist, who is also a parent of a special education student, the study found that 1). Parental involvement influences the academic progress and relates positively to the academic performance. 2). Parental involvement is a factor where behavior is concerned. 3) Parental involvement allows the child the best chance to reach his or her potential in several areas.

All four teachers and the school psychologist/parent in the study agreed there is indeed a positive correlation between parental involvement and the academic performance of a special education student. In addition, they viewed parental involvement as a factor which may influence a student academic and social performance.

During the writer's observations and interviews, he has examined several statements and aspects of behavior among the participants, which were relevant to the focus of inquiry of the study. The following is what the research participants reported to the researcher:

Teacher-C briefly stated that, "My students whose parents are involved do better academically because 1.) They turn in more assignments 2.) They get extra help at

home 3.) They take more pride in their work because they know Mom and Dad will see it.”

In relationship to Teacher-C statements, a study conducted by (Volensky, 1995) found that the children of the parents who participated in the schools activities had less learning difficulties and more positive attitude toward school. They also were less moody, more secure, and more assertive.

Furthermore, Teacher-B related that, “Where parent involvement is evident is in behavior. Students whose parents are more involved are usually not behavior problems in school.”

Algozzine (1995), in a similar study, closely supported Teacher-B’s statement when he expressed that, “The combined influences of home and school shape the social and academic development of a child”

Moreover, Miss-A expressed that, “When students have handicapping conditions, it is difficult to know which factors influence the academic achievement. Parents often become frustrated when they try to tutor a mentally handicapped child at home. The learning process is slow. Teaching self-help and daily living skills are difficult enough. Parental involvement is definitely a factor where behavior is concerned.”

Teacher-D related that, “I have no current benchmark by which to assess how parental involvement increases student academic performance due to the population I am working with. I can only postulate based on previous generations parental involvement that it was a positive influence.”

Teacher-A added that, factors such as: “Motivation, value of education,

appropriate social behavior, regular school attendance, and respect for authority figures lead to higher academic achievement. These factors may not be found in a special-needs population.”

Another area of concern for the participants in the study is the increasing involvement and collaboration that they wish to see among parents in all facets of school activities and programs. Teacher-C claimed that, “My students’ performance depicts that they receive better grades if their parents are involved.”

The general idea behind parental participation coincides with the old adage that “the apple does not fall far from the tree,” or “as the tree is bent so the branch will follow,” all attest to the knowledge that the child is often a carbon copy of one, both, or a combination of, their biological parents but still is influenced by his or her environment.

According to the study, educators can take several approaches in improving home and school relations. Both teachers and parents should emphasize the importance of the home environment for the educational success of a child. Teachers should foster parents’ interest in educational values because parents help to supply the resources for the school. Both parents and teachers should provide each other with instruction, information, and guidance.

The writer felt that the problem of resistance among parents to take part in educating their children is a result of a lack of education and commitment. Parents do not know how much their contributions are important for the success of the learners. One way that the writer suggested fostering parental participation was through education.

School staff needs to create a sense of responsibility as well as partnership among parents.

Throughout the interview with the school psychologist, the writer noticed that he emphasized motivation rather than anything else. Ysseldyke (1995) shared that all parents need to encourage their disabled children to do well.

Recommendations

Results from the study have allowed the writer to outline some postulates for parents of children with disabilities. According to all teachers and the psychologist interviewed, " Parents need to keep in close touch with the child's teacher and the school in general. The parent should monitor: 1) academic progress, 2) homework 3) feelings of selfworth the child has. Parents need to go "to bat" and defend their child if the teacher places the child in an impossible or inappropriate situation where they feel devalued and ridiculed. For example, the SLD child may be placed in a regular education class for a subject and the teacher has motivation technique such as paper airplanes, on the board, that move as the student succeeds at his/her lessons. Perhaps the lesson is too difficult for the students and their airplanes do not move at all. The SLD student will notice that the other students' airplanes move but his/hers does not. The student will lose confidence, devalue his/herself and dislike the subject, if despite good effort the task is impossible. The parent should schedule a teacher conference and get the situation changed.

On the other hand the parent needs to support the school and teachers so the child sees worth in education. The parent should work with the teacher so that if homework is required the parent knows what it is, provides a quiet and safe work area and checks that the homework is completed. Parental support offers an excellent chance for special student education to have a very good self concept, gain academic skills and succeed in life.

Implications and Limitations

This study was designed to provide an objective look at the extent to which the academic performance of a special education student increases through parental involvement in four public schools in Palm Beach County. The study did not consider all the variables and aspects which may also have significant impact on a special education student. Consequently, the limitations and implications discuss in the study must be documented and validated by further research.

The following specific areas are proposed for further research:

- 1) A study should be conducted to determine the impact of gender, ethnic background, and the economic make-up of the student population in Palm Beach County.
- 2) A study should be conducted on similarities and differences between schools which supported by the integrated services delivery model and schools that follow the general curriculum.
- 3) A study should be conducted to determine the impact of cultural differences among the special student education population.

Questionnaires were not tested for reliability. Therefore, the results can only be generated for this group of participants. The results of the study are limited due to limited samples. The results are based on observations and interviews conducted with four teachers, four parents, four students, and one school psychologist/parent of a child with learning disability. Because of the limitation of time, the researcher did not do additional research to determine whether or not schools with the integrated services

have seen more academic increases in special education students than schools using only the general curriculum, due to parental involvement.

Three out of four parents who participated in this study are new immigrant parents and have limited education which intensifies the situation. These parents do not have the skill, knowledge, and they are unfamiliar with the American school system to fully integrate and understand their roles as parents. Therefore, their input is not very appropriate and dependable.

Finally, follow-up studies should be conducted to determine if differences exist between parents of the schools that have the Integrated Services and those of the schools that do not have the Integrated Services regarding parental involvement. As the writer noticed, there is no difference in the attitude of the teachers that have adopted the program and there is no difference in the parental attitude of the parents in the program. Therefore, I believe that the program has succeeded in adopting ideas for implementation for parental involvement but has not succeeded in changing teacher or parental attitudes.

APPENDIX A
TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

TEACHER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Please describe your position. Why do you find it interesting? What is most important to you?
2. What steps have you taken to help your Special Education Students improve their academic performance?
3. What do you do to get parents involved in the educational process of these students?
4. How does the school make special efforts to reach families from all racial, cultural and language groups in your community?
5. How does the school make special efforts to reach working and single families?
6. What does your school do to reach families who are not as involved?
7. What does your school do to provide opportunities for parents and teachers to develop strong partnerships?
8. How do your students feel when their parents visit the classroom?
9. How do you feel about parents signing the consent form? What do you do to get it done?
10. Do you find any relationship between student academic performance and parental involvement?
11. What would you like to see happen with parental involvement in educating special education students in the year to come?
12. What evidence do you have that the student academic performance increases through parental participation?

APPENDIX B
PARENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

PARENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How long has your child been attending the special education class at this center?
2. What were the reasons that you choose to use the service of a special education class?
3. Has the special education class helped your child? If so, in what ways?
4. Does the school give you the opportunity to develop a relationship with the principal?
5. Does the school involve you as parent in decision making?
6. Does the school fully involve you to plan for your child's academic achievement?
7. Does the school help you to be more effective as parent?
8. What do you think would be the best ways to involve parents in improving their children achievement at the school?
9. What kind of support would you need from the school to be better connected in the school/family activities?
10. Is your involvement a success for the academic and social development of your child?
11. Has being in the special education class been a positive experience for your child? If yes, how?
12. How important is the special education class for your child's academic success?
13. How do you feel when the school invites you to take part in educating your child?

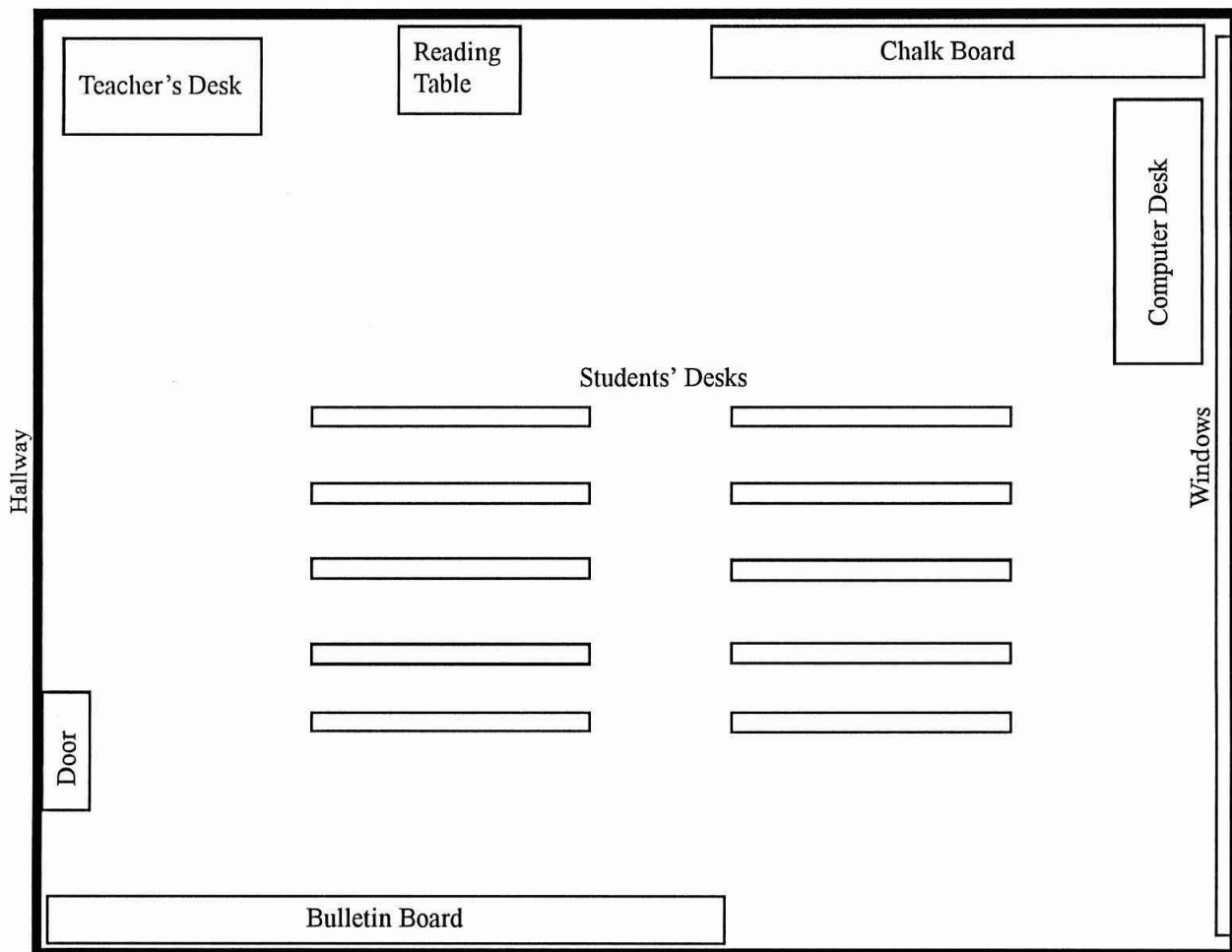
APPENDIX C
STUDENT'S QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How long have you been attending this school?
2. How do you feel in being placed in a special education class?
3. Do you feel that you have benefited from being placed in a special education class?
4. In what area(s) do you feel that you have made the most improvement?
5. Do your parents visit your classroom? If yes, how do you feel?
6. Do you feel isolated from your friends by being placed in a special education class?
7. Are the subjects matter easier or harder to deal with in the special education class setting?

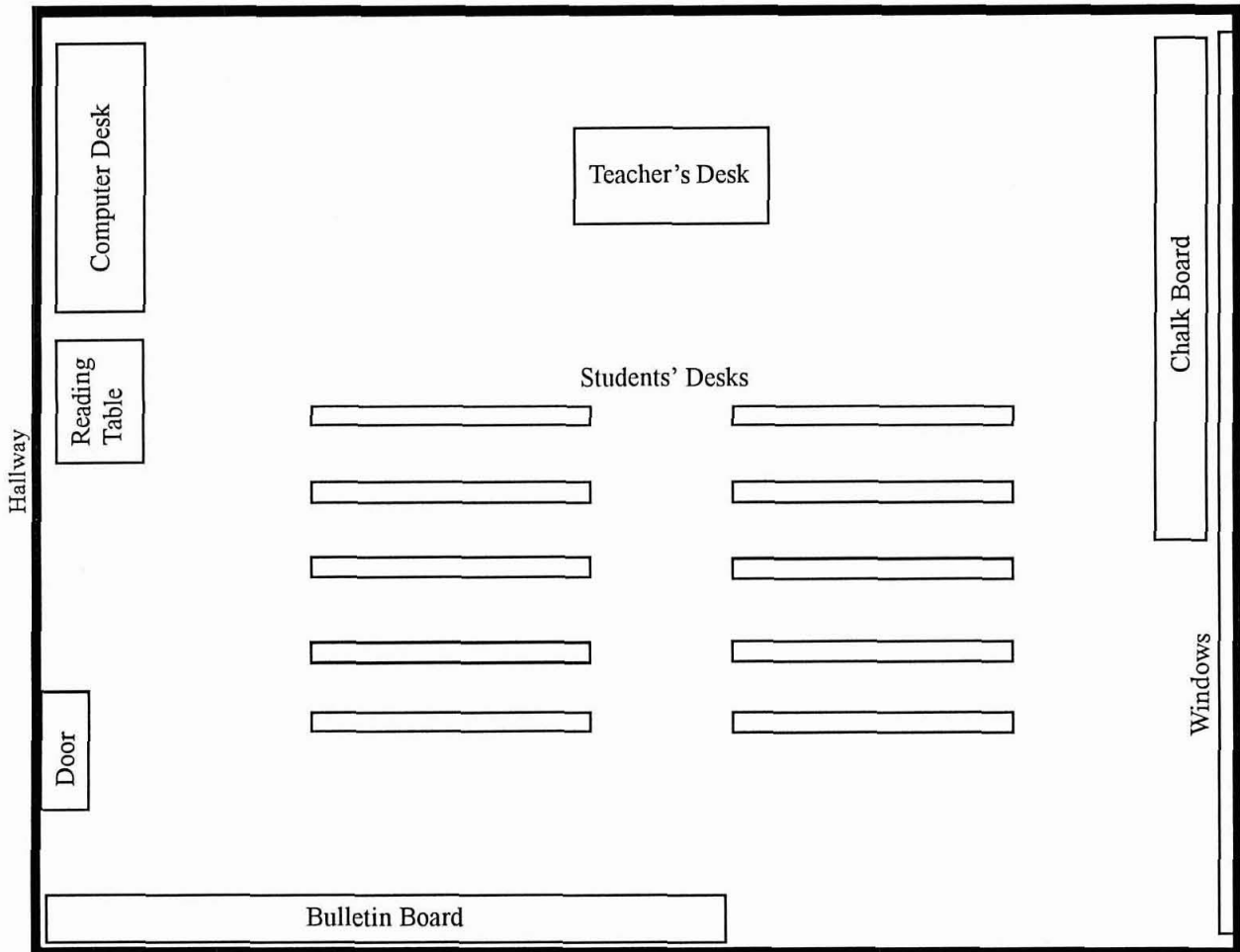
APPENDIX D
ARRANGEMENT FOR CLASSROOM A

Arrangement of Classroom A



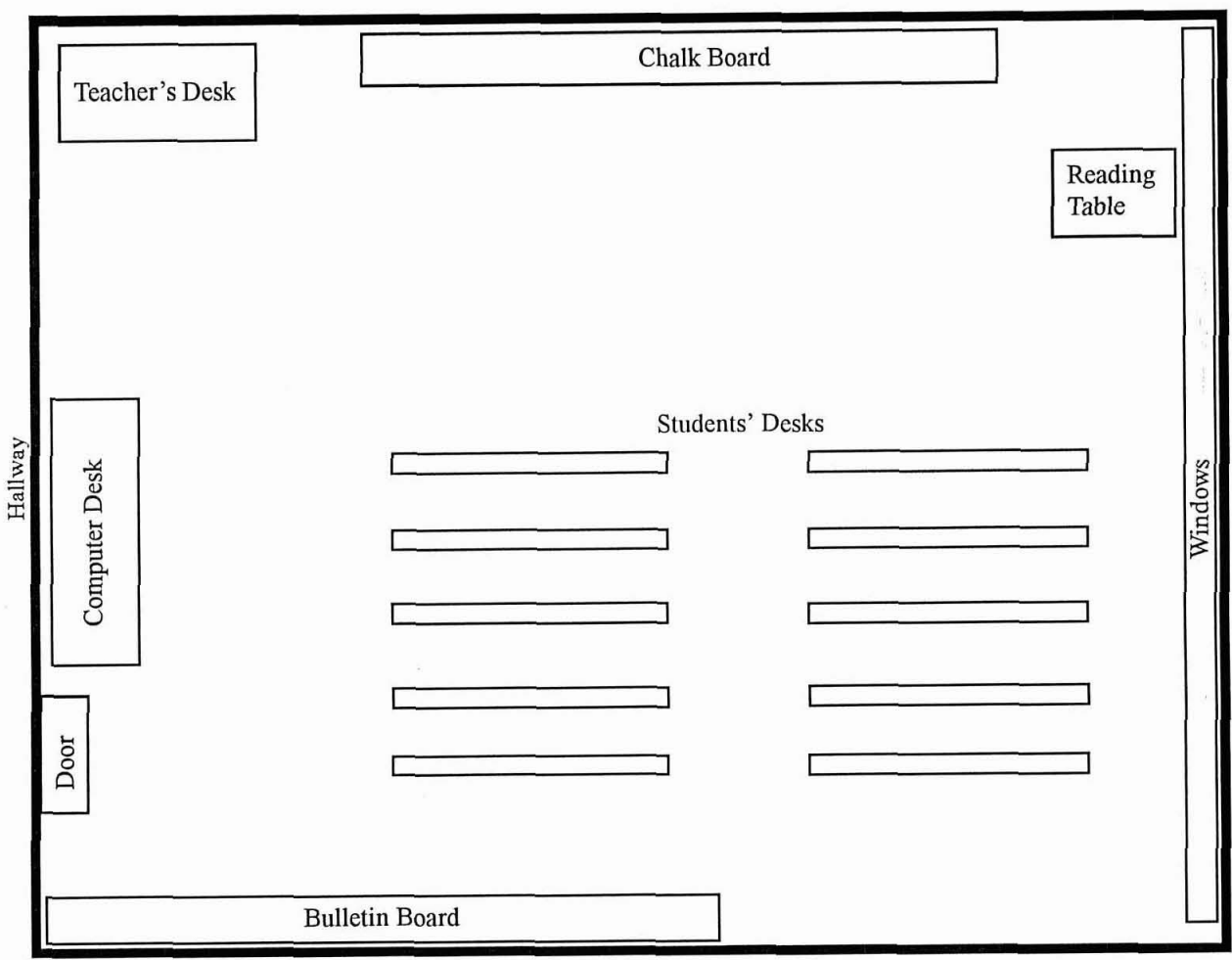
APPENDIX E
ARRANGEMENT FOR CLASSROOM B

Arrangement of Classroom B



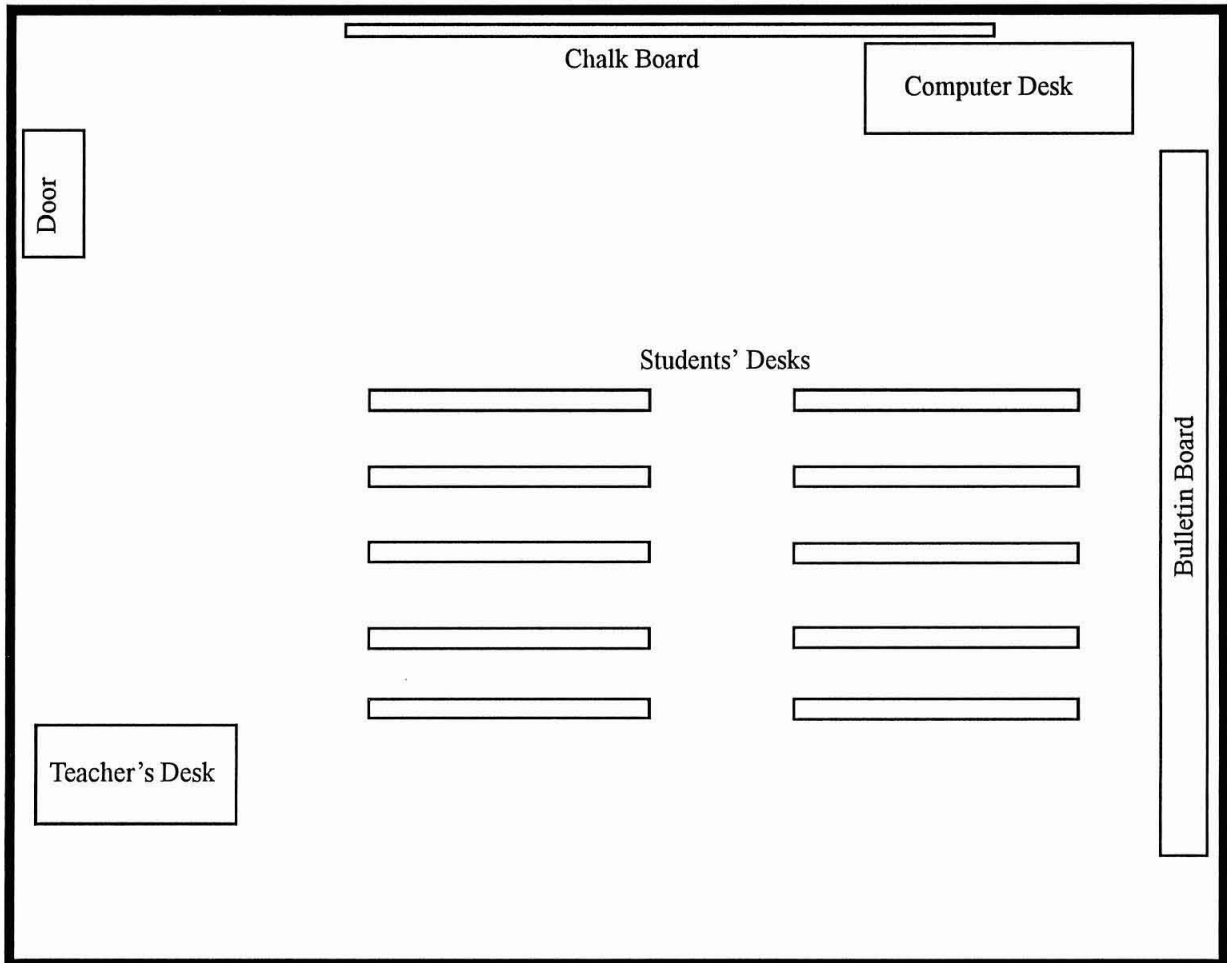
APPENDIX F
ARRANGEMENT FOR CLASSROOM C

Arrangement of Classroom C



APPENDIX G
ARRANGEMENT FOR CLASSROOM D

Arrangement of Classroom D



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