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The Section 504 Process in Middle Schools: Perspectives of Parents, Teachers, and Section 504 Coordinators

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THE SECTION 504 PROCESS IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS: PERSPECTIVES OF
PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND SECTION 504 COORDINATORS

by

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Bachelor of Science, University of North Dakota, 1980

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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This dissertation, submitted by Kari S. Chiasson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Department Teaching and Learning

Degree Doctor of Education

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Signature Kari Chiasson

Date 6-7-04

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions, experiences, and actions/interactions of teachers, parents, and Section 504 coordinators regarding the development and implementation of the Section 504 process for children in middle schools who have attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), or central auditory processing disorder (CAPD). This study provided an opportunity to explain or predict specific aspects of the Section 504 process, offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaning for those involved in the Section 504 process.

This qualitative study utilized methodologies associated with a grounded theory approach through in-depth interviews. The first research question explored participants' understanding of the development, implementation, and support of individualized accommodation plans (IAPs) for students with ADD/ADHD and/or CAPD in middle schools. The second research question addressed the contextual and intervening conditions that influenced the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 IAPs. The third research question investigated the consequences that were derived from the contextual and intervening conditions that affected the development, implementation, and support of IAPs for middle school students with ADD/ADHD and/or CAPD.

The participants in this study included four parents of middle school age children who were diagnosed with ADD/ADHD or CAPD and had a Section 504 IAP. In addition

to the parents, three middle school teachers and three Section 504 coordinators were selected for this study.

Based on the findings of this study, three broad based conclusions are offered:

1. Parents and teachers lack a clear understanding of the Section 504 process and sometimes feel frustrated during the development, implementation, or review of a student's IAP.
2. Parents of children with ADD/ADHD or CAPD do not feel valued as a team member in the development and implementation of their child's IAP.
3. The issue of lack of time within a teacher's schedule was a major barrier to collaboration and communication with parents.

Recommendations were made for those involved in the Section 504 process. In addition, recommendations were made for educators, parents, and those interested in conducting further research.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions, experiences, and actions/interactions of teachers, parents, and Section 504 coordinators regarding the development and implementation of the Section 504 process for children in middle schools who have attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), or central auditory processing disorder (CAPD).

In Chapter I, I provide the reader information on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1973. I discuss the function of Section 504 within the school setting and provide a list of definitions to assist the reader in the understanding of the Section 504 process. The need, purpose, rationale, delimitations, and organization of this study are also included in this chapter.

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (P. L. 101-336) is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against all students as well as the denial of educational services, programs or activities to students with disabilities (Clearinghouse on Education of Handicapped and Gifted Children, 1992). ADA provides additional protection in combination with actions brought under Section 504 and IDEA. Reasonable accommodations are required for eligible students with a disability to perform essential

functions or characteristics of a job. This applies to any part of the special education program that may be community based and involve job training or placement (Henderson, 1995). ADA also addresses accessibility issues for students with disabilities such as “transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications” (Alexander & Alexander, 1995, p. 440). Examples of modifications that address accessibility for students might include lifts for buses, widened doorways, wheelchair ramps, and lowered sinks.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act of 1990

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 governs all special education services for children between the ages of 3-21 in the United States. For a student to be eligible for special education and related services (e.g., speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy) under IDEA, the student must meet the criteria for eligibility in one or more of the 13 disability categories identified in the law and their disability must adversely affect their educational performance. The 13 categories include autism, specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, serious emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, hearing impairment, deafness, mental retardation, deaf-blindness, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, and other health impairment (Henderson, 1995). Each disability category has specific criteria that assist school personnel to determine if a disability is present. In addition to the criteria being met, the disabling condition must adversely affect the student's educational performance. Federal law mandates that every eligible child will receive a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment that is guaranteed through procedural safeguards and due process to ensure the rights of parents, students, and the

schools. Federal funding is provided to states in their efforts to ensure a free, appropriate public education to children who are deemed eligible under IDEA.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1973

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. § 794, P. L. 93-112) is a federal antidiscrimination statute. It is a civil rights act that protects the civil and constitutional rights of persons with disabilities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states, "No otherwise qualified disabled individual... shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (29 U.S.C. § 794 [a], 1998).

The act provides a set of definitions that describes what is meant by "individual with a handicap," as well as defining the impact of the disability or condition on a "major life activity." Under Section 504, an individual with a disability is defined as any individual who "(a) has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities, (b) has a record of such impairment, or (c) is regarded as having such an impairment" (29 U.S.C. § 706 (7) (B), 1998). Further, physical or mental impairment is described as

(a) any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological; musculoskeletal; special sense organs; respiratory, including speech organs, cardiovascular; reproductive; digestive; genito-urinary; hermic and lymphatic; skin; and endocrine; or (b) any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities. (Code of Federal Regulations, 1998, 45 C.F.R. § 84.3 (j) (2) (i), 34 C.F.R. § 104 (j) (2) (i))

The second part of the definition relates to the impact of the disability or condition on a major life activity. Major life activities are defined as “functions such as caring for one’s self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working” (Code of Federal Regulations, 1998, 45 C.F.R. § 84.3 (j) (2) (i), 34 C.F.R. § 104 (j) (2) (i)). Recently, the major life activities of sitting, reaching, stooping, and procreating have been added to the list as a result of court cases (Smith, 2002).

Having a record of such an impairment means that the individual “has a history of, or has been identified as having, a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Finally, one who is regarded as having an impairment is defined as one who

(a) has a physical or mental impairment that does not substantially limit major life activities but is treated by a recipient as constituting such a limitation; (b) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits major life activities only as a result of the attitudes of others toward such impairment; or (c) has none of the impairments defined but is treated by a recipient as having such an impairment. (Code of Federal Regulations, 1998, 45 C.F.R. § 84.3 (j) (2) (i), 34 C.F.R. § 104 (j) (2) (i))

Examples of diseases, conditions, and disabilities that have been accommodated for under Section 504 include attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity, anxiety, asthma, behavioral difficulties, central auditory processing disorder, cerebral palsy, communicable disease, conduct disorder, depression, drug/alcohol addiction, eating disorder, medical conditions (asthma, allergies, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, hemophilia), obesity, posttraumatic stress syndrome, and temporary illness (Miller & Newbill, 1998).

Section 504 Within the School Setting

Tyler, a sixth grade student in middle school, was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) in third grade. At that time, the Section 504 committee convened and determined that Tyler was eligible for services under Section 504 and proceeded to develop an individual accommodation plan. The plan listed specific classroom accommodations and modifications that were implemented by his teachers during the school day. While on an individual accommodation plan, Tyler successfully finished fourth and fifth grades.

Since transitioning to middle school, his teachers have reported that he frequently loses assignments, consistently forgets to fill out his planner, does not bring necessary materials to class, and appears to daydream several times during the day. He is failing in three of his six classes and appears to lack motivation for anything that deals with academics. His parents have noted that when doing homework assignments, he frequently gets upset, starts to cry, and eventually locks himself in his room and refuses to talk to anyone. He has told his parents that he hates school and wishes that he could just quit.

Jana is an eighth grade student who has received grades of C's and an occasional D in her classes during sixth and seventh grades. During a team planning time, Jana's teachers share concerns about her performance in classes. Mrs. Smith, the English teacher, reports that Jana appears to be inattentive in class and seems to misunderstand verbal directions resulting in missed or partially completed assignments. Her current grade in English is a low D. Mr. Jones, the math teacher, shares that Jana is failing in math and does not seem to understand the processes required to do the computations. He has offered to tutor her but she has declined. The team decides that a meeting with the

parents is necessary to discuss their concerns about Jana. During the meeting, the teachers share their concerns with Jana's parents. Her parents report that they are worried about Jana's schoolwork and her inability to make and maintain friendships. In addition to her difficulties with peer relationships, she seems to be immature for her age and is often the target of ridicule by her peers. After a lengthy discussion, the team suggests to the parents that Jana be tested for central auditory processing disorder by the school's audiologist. According to the audiologist's report, Jana does have central auditory processing disorder and would most likely benefit from classroom accommodations and curricular modifications. The Section 504 committee determined that Jana is eligible for services under Section 504 and an individual accommodation plan was developed outlining specific accommodations and modifications to assist Jana throughout her school day.

Interpretation and understanding of the mandates set forth by Section 504 for students like Tyler and Jana continue to evolve. For more than 20 years, Section 504 was virtually ignored by many public schools because many administrators assumed that meeting the needs of students with disabilities under P. L. 94-142 was all that was required (Council of Administrators of Special Education, 1992). School districts perceived their main obligation under Section 504 as ensuring physical access to public buildings (i.e., ramps were installed, curbs were cut, elevators were added to multi-story buildings, etc). As parents and advocates for children with disabilities learned more about Section 504, schools were required to respond to requests for protections and services under this law (Smith, 2002).

In 1991, a joint policy memorandum from the Department of Education and Office of Civil Rights (OCR) brought Section 504 legislation into the forefront and initiated widespread discussions about its implementation in public schools (Davila, Williams, & MacDonald, 1991). The Department of Education and Office of Civil Rights have become active in assisting school district personnel to broaden their understanding of “equal access” to include classroom accommodations and modifications through individual accommodation plans for students with special needs.

The individual accommodation plan is a document developed by a team of individuals who know the student. It describes the student’s disability and outlines the accommodations and modifications that will be made by the general education teachers and other school staff. Individual accommodation plans are used so that students like Tyler and Jana can be successful in their educational programs (Conderman & Katsiyannis, 1995; deBettencourt, 2002). Section 504 individual accommodation plans are intended to “level the playing field” so that students with disabilities have equal opportunities (Miller & Newbill, 1998; Smith, 2002).

Smith (2002) stated that Section 504 is not the responsibility of special education; rather, it is the responsibility of general education. In fact, all institutions receiving federal financial assistance must comply with Section 504. Therefore, it is especially critical for general education teachers to understand the educational implications of Section 504 as it relates to students in their classrooms.

In the early 1990s, a high school social studies teacher was sued by a student’s parents for refusing to provide oral testing, an accommodation listed on the student’s individualized education plan. The teacher lost the case and was required to pay \$15,000

in punitive and compensatory damages as well as attorney fees (Zirkel, 1997). Even though the accommodation was listed on an individualized education plan rather than an individual accommodation plan, the ramifications for general educators who do not comply with the law are becoming evident in the courts.

Definitions

The following terms are defined to guide those reading this study:

Accommodations: Instructional strategies, methods, and services that comprise a student's Section 504 plan so that the student may access or participate in a course standard or test. These provisions do not fundamentally alter or lower the standard or expectation of the course standard or test (Freedman, 1997).

Attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD): A combination of characteristics including inattention, impulsivity, and/or hyperactivity (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Central auditory processing disorder (CAPD): The inability of individuals with normal hearing and intelligence to differentiate sounds. Symptoms may include difficulty with paying attention to and remembering information presented orally; problems in carrying out multi-step directions; poor listening skills; difficulty with reading, comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary; and a slower processing time (Bellis, 1996).

Individual accommodation plan (IAP or 504 plan): A document developed by the school's Section 504 committee that determines a student's eligibility, specific modifications in the educational setting, and supportive services deemed appropriate for the student to receive a free, appropriate education. The plan may include environmental modifications, curricular modifications, modified testing procedures, a behavior

management plan, dyslexia services, counseling, transportation, or a variety of other modifications and support services (Smith, 2002).

Middle school team: A group of teachers representing the curricular areas of math, science, English, and social studies who have a common planning period where they work together on curriculum integration, programs, and student issues (George & Alexander, 2003).

Section 504 process: Routine actions or procedures used to develop, implement, and revise Section 504 individual accommodation plans (Miller & Newbill, 1998).

Section 504 committee: A group or team of individuals (i.e., teachers, principal, Section 504 coordinator, counselor, etc.) who are knowledgeable about the student, the meaning of the evaluation data, and the placement options available. The members of the committee will make all necessary decisions regarding identification, evaluation, eligibility, and placement (Richards, 1994).

Section 504 coordinator: A person responsible in the school district who is highly trained about the Section 504 process. Duties include developing and maintaining a Section 504 program, distributing the necessary documents to individuals involved in the Section 504 process, and overseeing the actions of Section 504 committees. The coordinator also handles parent complaints, coordinates responses to the Office of Civil Rights investigations, and makes necessary arrangements for Section 504 due process hearings (Richards, 1994).

Need for the Study

The intention of this study was to develop a theory based on the in-depth investigation of the experiences and perceptions of a small number of parents, teachers,

and Section 504 coordinators regarding the development and implementation of individual accommodation plans in the middle school. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), “theory denotes a set of well developed categories (e.g. themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant social, psychological, educational, nursing or other phenomena” (p. 22). Once the theory has been grounded in the data, it may be used to explain or predict specific aspects of the phenomena, offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaning for those involved in the process (Creswell, 2002).

During the review of the literature, I found a vast amount of information that addresses the legalities of the Section 504 process; comparisons of IDEA, Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act; and specific accommodations and modifications that may be incorporated into a student’s individual accommodation plan. Likewise, I was able to locate several studies and one dissertation that addressed issues about Section 504. In contrast, there was a limited amount of information available that addressed the perceptions and experiences of those involved in the Section 504 process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions, experiences, and actions/interactions of teachers, parents, and Section 504 coordinators regarding the development and implementation of the Section 504 process for children in middle schools who have attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), or central auditory processing disorder (CAPD).

Research Questions

The following three research questions served to guide the investigation:

1. What is the understanding of the development, implementation and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans for students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools by parents, teachers, and 504 coordinators?
2. What are the contextual and intervening conditions that influence the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans for middle school students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools?
3. What consequences or outcomes are derived from the contextual and intervening conditions that affect the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans for middle school students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools?

Rationale for the Study

My interest in this research was prompted by my experiences as a parent of a middle school age child who has a central auditory processing disorder. Since his diagnosis in third grade, he has been receiving accommodations and modifications through an individual accommodation plan. During elementary school, he consistently maintained grades of A's and B's. At the end of his fifth grade year, he was acknowledged for his academic performance and received the presidential academic achievement award. He enjoyed going to school and the process of learning.

When he transitioned to sixth grade, my husband and I were assured that the accommodations and modifications that were made for him in elementary school would also be provided in middle school. Prior to the start of school, our family attended the open house orientation to middle school. After the school orientation meeting, we proceeded to go to the classrooms to meet the teachers. He was very excited to be on the team that he was assigned, had already memorized his schedule, and could hardly wait for school to begin.

Our first and only stop was at his homeroom. As we entered the room, he met his teacher and visited with him for several minutes. I looked upward and noticed that there was not a sound amplification system mounted on the ceiling (one of the accommodations listed on his individual accommodation plan). I approached the teacher to introduce myself and to share that my son was on an individual accommodation plan and that, he would need a sound amplification system in the room. The teacher was very polite and said that he was unaware that my son had an individual accommodation plan and that, as far as he knew, no sound system was planned to be installed in his classroom. He suggested that we talk with the administration before leaving to address the sound amplification system issue. The vice-principal was very apologetic and said that my son would need to be placed on a different team that already had sound amplification systems installed in the classrooms.

My son was devastated, upset and angry because he was going to be switched to another team. This was our first introduction to the Section 504 process in middle school. As the year progressed, numerous issues came up during parent teacher conferences regarding my son (e.g., poor grades, inattention, appearing bored, not filling out his

planner, not handing in his homework, medication, depression, reduction in self-esteem, reward systems, and tiredness). He became disinterested in school and began to view himself as stupid. We were losing him and I felt that the responsibility fell entirely on our shoulders. I could not understand how he could do so well in elementary school and, within less than a year, he was academically failing in middle school.

In January, I received a call from his teacher stating that it was time to update my son's individual accommodation plan. She suggested that we could review it over the phone and make the changes that were needed; she would re-type it and send it home to be signed. I questioned the appropriateness of the accommodations and modifications on the individual accommodation plan and suggested that maybe the team should meet to discuss the issues. She said that meeting to discuss a student's individual accommodation plan was not typically done and that rewriting the plan is just a formality because teachers naturally make accommodations for students. I conceded and gave her the updated information she requested as well as some suggestions for modifications and accommodations for his individual accommodation plan.

Over the next few months, I shared my concerns and frustration with friends and relatives about our experiences with the Section 504 process in middle school. I soon realized that there were other parents who had also encountered similar situations. The following list includes some of the questions that were raised from my personal experience and the experiences of other parents:

1. Do the regular education teachers know how to accommodate for different disabilities?

2. What accommodations or modifications are appropriate in the middle school setting?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities of the Section 504 coordinator?
4. What assurances do parents have that the teachers are following through with the accommodations and modifications listed on the individualized accommodation plan?
5. What is the role of the parent in the Section 504 process?

Researcher Bias

I realize that my personal experiences with the Section 504 process in middle schools might suggest to the reader that it was difficult to maintain a sense of objectivity in my research. In an attempt to reduce the possibility of researcher bias, I maintained an ongoing list of my thoughts about issues involving the Section 504 process in my research journal during the interview process. In addition, I remained cognizant of the possible bias during the interview process as well as during the analysis and interpretation of the data. Through exploration of the Section 504 process from differing perspectives, I hoped to gain a better understanding of the issues faced by parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators.

Delimitations of the Study

1. Participants in the study included four parents of children who were receiving accommodations or modifications through an individual accommodation plan, three middle school teachers who had taught students on an individual accommodation plan, and three Section 504 coordinators.

2. The parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators who were interviewed were from the same school district but not necessarily the same middle school.
3. Many other disabilities (e.g., low vision, orthopedic disability) and medical conditions (e.g., asthma, diabetes) may dictate the need for an accommodation plan for students in their school environment, but this study focused on students who had been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and/or central auditory processing disorder.

Organization of the Study

In Chapter I of this study, I provide the reader with an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1973. A discussion of the function of Section 504 within the school setting and a list of definitions to assist the reader in the understanding of the Section 504 process are also included. I address the need, purpose, rationale, delimitations, researcher bias, and organization of the study.

In Chapter II, I describe the qualitative methodology used for this study. I discuss the design, sampling procedures, a description of the methods of data collection, and the methods of data analysis. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the methods of verification surrounding the study.

In Chapter III, I describe the setting and the participants. I give voice to the parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators by describing, through rich description, their experiences and perceptions. At the end of the chapter, I briefly introduce the categories that emerged from the data analysis.

Chapter IV includes a description of the categories and themes derived from the data. These categories are presented using a coding paradigm that identifies a central phenomenon, explores causal conditions, specifies strategies, identifies the context and intervening conditions, and delineates the consequences. The categories and themes embedded within the coding paradigm are discussed with reference to the professional literature.

In Chapter V, the reader is provided with a summary, conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for those involved in the development and implementation of individual accommodation plans under Section 504.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions, experiences, and actions/interactions of teachers, parents, and Section 504 coordinators regarding the development and implementation of the Section 504 process for children in middle schools who have attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), or central auditory processing disorder (CAPD).

In Chapter II, I describe the research design, sampling procedures, negotiation of entry, confidentiality, and methods of data collection. This is followed by a detailed description of the data analysis process, including the identification of causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. The next section includes a discussion of the validity of the study.

This qualitative study utilized methodologies associated with a grounded theory approach to select data sources, design interview protocols, and collect and analyze data. The first research question explores participants' understanding of the development, implementation, and support of individualized accommodation plans for students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools. The second research question addresses the contextual and intervening conditions that influence the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans. The third research question investigates the

consequences or outcomes that are derived from the contextual and intervening conditions that affect the development, implementation, and support of individual accommodation plans for middle school students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools.

In this chapter, I provide a statement of the type of design that was utilized, a description of the methods of data collection, and a discussion of the methods of data analysis that were used. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the methods of verification and reliability for this study.

Research Design

Initially, my intent was to complete a phenomenological study to hopefully gain an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators about the Section 504 process in middle schools. Creswell (1998) stated that a phenomenological study describes “the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (pp. 51-52). During the analysis of the data, I came to the realization that my study was not simply about understanding the perceptions and experiences of the individuals involved in the Section 504 process but rather to understand the context within which the parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators acted and the influence that the context has on their actions. Maxwell (1996) suggested that events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the context in which they are derived. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), as one begins to make sense or understand the abstract phenomena, the researcher is able to generate a theory surrounding the actions, interactions, and social processes of people. The theory is grounded in the data from the field and emerges as a “set of well-developed concepts

related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 15).

Data Collection

The Setting

The setting for this study was a community in the Midwest with a population of approximately 49,000. The population is largely Caucasian, mostly Scandinavian and western European in background, and predominantly Lutheran and Catholic in religion. The school district within this community was chosen for this study because it housed four middle schools with teachers who had experience with the Section 504 process, and each middle school within the district had a staff member who was designated as a Section 504 coordinator.

Participants and Sampling Procedures

The participants were selected using theoretical sampling procedures. According to Creswell (2002), theoretical sampling in grounded theory means that the researcher chooses intentional and focused forms of data collection that will yield text and images useful in generating a theory.

Four parents were selected based on four criteria. First, their child had to be diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, or central auditory processing disorder. The reason for choosing the diagnoses of attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and central auditory processing disorder was because these are often considered to be “hidden disabilities” and accommodations are directly related to the child’s ability to learn. Second, their child was middle school

age and was currently in the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. Third, an individual accommodation plan had been written for their child while in middle school. A fourth criterion was that the children attended one of the four middle schools in the district that I was studying. This was important because I wanted to understand the Section 504 process of a specific school district with a defined set of policies and procedures. One of the parent participants had a son who was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and fine motor difficulties, two parents had sons who were diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, and one parent had a daughter who was diagnosed with central auditory processing disorder.

Three criteria were used to select three teachers for this study. First, they needed to have at least five years of teaching experience in the middle school setting. Second, I wanted to interview teachers who had experience with the Section 504 process and had taught students with a variety of disabilities including those with attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and central auditory processing disorder. Third, the teachers chosen for the interviews had experience teaching at different grade levels to address the issues of transition, the make-up of the core teams, and the patterns of movement of students from one class to another. All of the teachers chosen for this study had over 20 years of teaching experience. Each had experience teaching at the elementary level as well as the middle school level.

Three Section 504 coordinators were selected based on two criteria. First, they needed to have had at least five years experience completing the duties as a Section 504 coordinator, and, second, they were currently serving students at different middle schools in the school district. All of the Section 504 coordinators were also school counselors for

different middle schools in the district. Two of the counselors had previous teaching experience at the middle school level.

Negotiating Entry

In my attempt to identify possible parent participants, I contacted the state's Parent-to-Parent Network director and asked if she would forward a letter to parents in their database in the district where I was conducting the research. The letter contained a brief description of the project, the criteria that needed to be met, the time commitment required of the parent, and a request for participation. I was able to identify two parents who met the criteria and were willing to participate in the project. After each interview, I asked the parent if they could identify any other parents who have children with a similar diagnosis and are receiving services through Section 504. I was given four names of parents to contact. This is considered snowball sampling and is a method to identify individuals through purposeful sampling once a study begins (C. eswell, 2002). I contacted the four parents to determine if they met the criteria and were willing to participate in the study.

In the spring of 2003, I submitted a "Request to do Research" form to the Superintendent of Schools. The request outlined the purpose of the study, methodology that would be used, and the time commitments of the participants. I was granted written permission to move forward with the study.

To gain access to the Section 504 coordinators and teachers, I contacted the middle school principal or "gatekeeper" to discuss the research project and ask for a list of potential participants who met the criteria. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), gatekeepers are individuals who have an official or unofficial role at the site,

provide entrance to a site, help researchers locate people, and assist in the identification of places to study. After receiving a list of possible participants, I made an initial telephone call to the potential participants explaining the purpose of the study, the time commitment, and the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. The participants were informed that they could terminate the interviews at any time without any repercussion.

Confidentiality

During the interview process, parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators shared personal experiences that have the potential to cause conflict. Significant effort was made to minimize the risk as well as to protect the anonymity of the participants. The following procedures were implemented during this study:

1. Continuous effort was made to treat all participants with respect and sensitivity at all times.
2. The identity of the school district and individual middle schools was kept confidential by the researcher with no disclosure in the transcribed interviews, written reports, or this dissertation.
3. The researcher transcribed all audiotapes of the interviews.
4. The identity of every participant was kept confidential by using codes during the transcription process and pseudonyms in the dissertation.
5. Parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators signed consent forms prior to initiating the individual interviews.
6. A Release of Information form was signed by parents to secure appropriate documents.

The consent form provided participants with written documentation that explained the purpose and parameters of the study. The explicit right to withdraw from this study at any time without fear of repercussion was explained to each participant. (A blank copy of the consent form signed by the parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators is included in the Appendices.)

Interviews

Researchers using a grounded theory design rely heavily on interviews as a primary means of gathering data, perhaps as a way to capture the experiences of participants in their own words (Charmaz, 2000; Creswell, 1998). Interviewing was the primary means of collecting data for this study. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions were used to give the participants options for responding without constraint. Kvale (1996) described a research interview as “an interpersonal situation, a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest. It is a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through dialogue” (p. 125). I hoped to enter into a “dialogue” with the participants to explore their experiences and perceptions of the Section 504 process.

To ensure accurate information, I asked permission to audiotape all interviews while taking notes. During the first interview session, I asked participants to describe their personal histories and to reconstruct the details of their experiences with the Section 504 process. During the second interview, I asked for clarification that might be needed from the information received during the first interview and explored with the participants the meaning of their experiences with the Section 504 process (Seidman, 1998).

Interview Guide

An interview guide containing an outline of topics and possible questions was developed and used for each group of participants (Kvale, 1996). The topics that were explored included knowledge of the Section 504 process; knowledge of attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and central auditory processing disorder; experiences with the Section 504 process; perceptions of the Section 504 process; and communication between those involved in the Section 504 process (Appendices C, D, and E). The interview guide was used as a flexible tool during the interview process as well as a means for taking and organizing notes.

Interview Procedure

The interviews began in February of 2003 and extended into November of 2003. Participants were interviewed up to two times and each interview lasted 50 to 90 minutes. The interviews took place in a variety of settings depending on the participants' preferences and availability. The parent interviews took place in their homes, a restaurant, coffee shop, or workplace meeting room. The teachers preferred to be interviewed after school in their classrooms or in the team meeting rooms at their schools. The Section 504 coordinators were all interviewed in their offices.

It was my goal to establish a safe atmosphere, where participants felt comfortable sharing their feelings and experiences. Immediately before each interview, I spent several minutes in casual conversation with the participants in an attempt to reduce any fear or intimidation. At the beginning of each interview, I reminded the participants that I was not looking for right or wrong answers, but trying to understand the Section 504 process from their perspective. In addition, I briefed the participants about the purpose of the

interview, the use of the tape recorder, and asked if they had any questions (Kvale, 1996). Each interview was audio taped to preserve the actual words of the participant (Seidman, 1998).

The order of questions varied if a participant spontaneously mentioned a specific topic or issue. Lancy (1993) advised that “one’s goal in this type of interviewing is to obtain information, but also to remove any constraints on the interviewee’s response so that her conceptualization of phenomena emerges rather than having her fit her views into the investigator’s framework” (p. 17). Rubin and Rubin (1995) stressed the importance of the flexibility of the interview “because you have to work out questions to examine new ideas and themes that emerge during the interviews” and to “adjust the questioning so that individuals are asked about particular parts of a subject that they know best” (p. 45). The interviews with all participants tended to be open ended with follow-up questions for clarification.

I ended each interview by turning off the tape recorder and having a brief conversation about what had been shared during the interview. This gave the participants the opportunity to recapitulate issues that had been discussed earlier or share any other thoughts (Kvale, 1996).

Immediately after each interview, I recorded personal notes about impressions, insights, and possible emerging categories and themes in a research journal (Creswell, 2002). These notes were valuable as it assisted in the development of follow-up questions for subsequent interviews and data analysis.

Document Review

After the initial interview, I asked each parent if they would be willing to share a copy of their child's individualized accommodation plan for later analysis. Two of the four parents had a copy of the updated plan, one parent was able to obtain a copy from the school, and the other parent was unable to obtain a copy. Copies of available correspondence received by parents (e.g., letters, emails) regarding the Section 504 process were also provided for data analysis.

Transcription

Within 24 hours after the interview, I transcribed the audiotapes from interviews verbatim into typewritten text using the Ethnograph v5.0 for Windows™ program. As I transcribed the audiotapes, I inserted comments about observations that took place during the interview. An example of this was when a parent became teary-eyed as she talked about a situation at school that involved her son. Memos about initial impressions regarding emerging categories and possible future needs for interviewing were also documented.

Methods of Data Analysis

Coding Procedures

The procedures for data analysis in grounded theory involve three types of coding procedures: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 2002). Open coding consists of taking the data and segmenting them into categories of information (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Using the Ethnograph v5.0 for Windows™ program, I labeled text segments with defined codes and attached memos to the appropriate text. Memos

were written during the open coding process to note initial impressions and ideas about the emerging categories.

Creswell (2002) describes grounded theory as a “zigzag” process when collecting data. It is a continuous process where the researcher goes out to the field to gather data and brings them back for analyzing, goes back out to the field to gather more information and analyzes that data, and so forth until the categories of information become saturated. During this “zigzag” process of data collection and analyzing the data, the researcher compares the data to the emerging categories. This process is known as the constant comparative method of data analysis (Creswell, 1998, 2002).

Within the identified categories, I was able to determine several properties or themes that supported and pulled similar concepts together. Rereading the transcripts several times after the initial coding of data and using the constant comparative method of analysis allowed me to generate and connect categories by comparing experiences of participants in the data to other experiences, experiences to categories, and categories to other categories (Creswell, 2002; Glaser, 1992; Straus & Corbin, 1990). As I reviewed my memos and journal entries, I looked for consistencies as well as inconsistencies in the data. It was important that I remained flexible in my thinking to allow the themes to emerge within the categories. This re-conceptualization of the codes and categories was accomplished by analyzing the codebook and family tree options in the Ethnograph v5.0 for Windows™ program.

The next step in the process was to reassemble the data in new ways using the axial coding process. It was important to identify one of the categories as the central phenomenon and look at what caused this phenomenon to occur, what strategies or

actions were demonstrated in response to it, what context and intervening conditions influenced the strategies, and what consequences resulted from these strategies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Creswell (1998) describes axial coding as a “presentation using a coding paradigm or logic diagram in which the researcher identifies a central phenomenon, explores causal conditions, specifies strategies, identifies the context and intervening conditions and delineates the consequences” (p. 57). As I re-conceptualized the categories in an axial coding paradigm model, I was forced to continually think of the interrelatedness between each part of the paradigm.

The third set of coding procedures that I completed was selective coding. During the selective coding process, the researcher “writes a theory from the interrelationship of the categories in the axial coding model. At a basic level, this theory provides an abstract explanation for the process being studied in the research” (Creswell, 2002, p. 444).

After completing the three-step coding process, I developed a narrative discussion that summarizes the findings during the analysis process. In addition to the discussion, I developed a visual display to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the identified themes (Creswell, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Verification (Validity)

Qualitative researchers use several procedures to assure the accuracy and credibility of their findings. To assure “trustworthiness and authenticity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I used triangulation, member checks, clarification of researcher bias, and maintained an audit trail of the research process.

Triangulation is defined as “the process of corroborating information from different individuals (e.g., a principal and a student), types of data (e.g., observational

field notes and interviews), or methods of data collection (e.g., documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (Creswell, 2002, p. 651). In an attempt to gain multiple perspectives of the Section 504 process, it was important to interview individuals representing three different groups: parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that in order to build theory it is important for the grounded theory researcher to “obtain the varied meanings and interpretations of events, actions/interactions, and objects” (p. 44). In addition to the interviews, I used available correspondence between school personnel and parents as well as available copies of individual accommodation plans to verify that the information shared in the parent interviews was accurate.

Verification was achieved through member checks with participants. According to Creswell (2002), “member checking is a process where the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account” (p. 280). During the interviewing process, I asked for clarification and checked out my assumptions for accuracy gained from the data received (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Participants were asked to review their interview transcript for accuracy.

Merriam (1988) recommended that the researcher must clarify personal biases from the outset of the study so that the reader understands the researcher’s position and any assumptions that might impact the inquiry. A clarification statement regarding my personal bias was included in Chapter I.

An audit trail that outlined the research process and the development of codes, categories, and theory was maintained (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The audit trail for this

study consisted of chronological research activities, pre-conceptualizations, interviews, initial coding efforts, analysis of data, and development of the theoretical model.

CHAPTER III

DATA

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions, experiences, and actions/interactions of teachers, parents, and Section 504 coordinators regarding the development and implementation of the Section 504 process for children in middle schools who have attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), or central auditory processing disorder (CAPD). In Chapter III, I describe the setting for this study and give voice to the participants through vignettes as the participants share their personal experiences and perceptions of the Section 504 process. To protect anonymity, the names used in the vignettes are pseudonyms.

Description of the Setting

The setting for this study was a community in the upper Midwest with a population of 49,000. The population is largely Caucasian with mostly Scandinavian and western European heritage. Individuals in this community are predominantly Lutheran or Catholic.

The public school district consists of 12 elementary schools (grades K-5), 4 middle schools (grades 6-8), 2 high schools (grades 9-12), 1 alternative high school (for students 16 years and older), and an adult education program. Of the 650 teachers employed in the school district, 300 hold graduate level degrees and the staff's average years of experience in the field of education is slightly over 14 years.

Description of the Participants

Interviews with Parents

Mrs. White

Mrs. White is married and the mother of two girls and two boys. Both she and her husband work outside of the home. Mrs. White works as an administrative assistant, and her husband works in law enforcement. She described her youngest son, Tyler, as a normal 14 year old who is bright and creative. She shared that Tyler can be very focused, gets disoriented, and does not have many friends.

During the middle of the sixth grade year, Mr. and Mrs. White met with Tyler's teacher. At the meeting, the teacher shared her concerns about Tyler's lack of attention and inability to focus in school. The teacher also shared that she has a son with attention deficit disorder and thought that Tyler had similar characteristics. She suggested that they fill out a questionnaire and take the information to their pediatrician to determine if Tyler had attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity. After one visit to the pediatrician, Tyler was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and prescribed a stimulant medication that seemed to help him focus during school. An individualized accommodation plan was written toward the end of the sixth grade. Tyler's teacher was willing to try different accommodations to see what would help Tyler perform better in school. Mrs. White indicated that Tyler's sixth grade teacher was wonderful and stated, "She never made him feel like it was his fault, or that he was lazy, and she never blamed me. She told Tyler, 'I know this is hard for you but you need to just try a little harder.'"

The next fall, Mrs. White was scheduled to meet with Tyler's team of teachers to review the individualized accommodation plan. Prior to the meeting, Mrs. White wrote a

letter to the teachers outlining what they could expect from Tyler and listed efficient ways of working with him in school. While at the meeting, she gave each teacher a copy of the letter. She noted that one teacher read the entire letter at the meeting while the other teachers set the letter aside. Mrs. White shared that Tyler “aced the class” of the teacher who had read the letter and failed the classes of the teachers who did not take the time to read it at the meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting, Mrs. White recalled that the teachers asked her what she wanted written on the plan. When she replied that she would like them to do what was done the previous year, the teachers stated that the accommodations that were made in sixth grade would not work in seventh grade, because the classes are separate and there is not one core teacher. Mrs. White shared her thoughts.

I was thinking, I know what I want but how do I know what I can have. Tell me what I can have. Tell me what I can't have. Tell me how to figure out what it is we need to do and no one seems to know. Not the teachers, not the counselors, nobody.

Mrs. Dorn

Mrs. Dorn is married and has one son, Brian. Mrs. Dorn has a bachelor's degree in elementary and special education and a master's degree in reading. She currently teaches elementary age students in special education. Her husband has a bachelor's degree in business administration and education and currently works for the military. Mrs. Dorn described Brian as having high energy, being a hands-on kid, and loving to be busy. He starts each day fresh and is very helpful at home. He enjoys playing hockey, putting together models, and building with Lego™ blocks. He has difficulty developing and maintaining social relationships because of his inability to read social cues.

During Brian's first grade year, the teacher and student teacher met with Mrs. Dorn during the spring parent teacher conferences. The student teacher took the lead during the meeting and began to describe Brian's inappropriate behaviors in the classroom. She gave several examples by saying, "When others are doing this, Brian is doing this." The classroom teacher suggested that the student teacher develop a behavior plan using a sticker reward system. Mrs. Dorn shared that the behavior plan did not work and realized that she needed to pursue other avenues to help Brian with his inability to focus during school.

Mrs. Dorn brought completed behavior checklists, work samples, and copies of report cards to Brian's physician. After listening to Mrs. Dorn's concerns and observing Brian, he made a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactive disorder and prescribed medication to help Brian with his attending skills and impulsive behaviors.

The next few years went fairly well until Brian entered fifth grade. Mrs. Dorn shared that fifth grade was an awful year for Brian, because he experienced social problems with the other boys in his class. He was frequently ostracized from the group of boys in his class and did not have any friends. Mrs. Dorn also described a situation regarding the medication that Brian was supposed to be getting at school. She stated that the teachers were concerned about Brian, because he was refusing to eat the school lunch. She later found out that Brian was not receiving his medication at the scheduled time because school personnel did not work in the office over lunch break. Without consulting her, the school staff decided to give the medication to Brian before lunchtime resulting in a loss of appetite.

Over the next year, Mrs. Dorn worked with professionals from the medical community to determine what medications and interventions would benefit her son. During this time, medication levels were increased and Brian met with a counselor to work on social skills.

Mrs. Dorn shared that Brian was placed on an individualized accommodation plan during his sixth grade year because of an incident that occurred in his social studies class. The students were expected to learn the state capitals and would be tested on their knowledge. During the test, he was given a blank map of the United States and was told to fill in the state names and capital cities. When he realized that he would have to do the test without any key words, he approached the teacher to ask for a list of the cities and states to help him complete the test. When the teacher told Brian that he would not give him a list, Brian fell apart. He started to cry and could not get himself under control. Subsequently, the sixth grade team decided to write an individualized accommodation plan that allowed Brian to leave the classroom if he lost control. When asked about the meeting to address the issue, Mrs. Dorn stated, "There never was a meeting; it was just the teachers." After a brief moment of silence, Mrs. Dorn quietly shared that Brian was so humiliated, because the teachers asked him to sign the plan.

Prior to entering seventh grade, Mrs. Dorn contacted the assistant principal to inform him that her son had an individualized accommodation plan because of his attention deficit hyperactive disorder. She was told that the teachers would be reviewing all of the plans before the beginning of school and that the teachers would call her if they had any questions. Mrs. Dorn said that the first contact she had with the seventh grade teachers about Brian's behaviors was at the fall parent teacher conferences. Even though

they discussed his hyperactivity, there was no discussion of the individualized accommodation plan.

In February, Mrs. Dorn received a copy of a revised individualized accommodation plan in the mail outlining characteristics of Brian's disability and the accommodations that would be provided. The characteristics section of the plan indicated that Brian is inattentive, not on task, misses directions for assignments, sometimes bothers others, and sometimes loses self-control in a stressful situation. The accommodations and modifications section of the individual accommodation plan stated that he would benefit from preferential seating, eye contact from the teacher, repeated directions, planner use, and removal from a stressful situation if a loss of control takes place. Mrs. Dorn shared that no one had contacted her for input into the plan. She was expected to sign it and send it back to the school.

Mr. Jones

Mr. Jones is married and has two sons. He and his wife hold full-time positions. Jason, the youngest son, is involved in Boy Scouts, wrestling, football, and band. Mr. Jones became aware that Jason was having difficulty in school while in the second grade. Mr. Jones reflected and stated, "Even though his teacher said that she was frustrated and was having trouble controlling him, she didn't do anything about it."

During the first few weeks of third grade, Jason's teacher asked Mr. Jones to come into the classroom and observe Jason. Based on the observation of Jason in the third grade classroom, Mr. Jones stated, "It was clear that he wasn't able to learn or get the information like the other kids."

As a result of the observation, Mr. and Mrs. Jones took Jason to a physician and received the diagnosis of attention deficit disorder. The physician prescribed medication to help Jason with his social skills and behaviors in school. Even though Jason received a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder and medication was prescribed, school personnel did not develop an individualized accommodation plan. It was not until a few years later that the elementary school counselor suggested that an individual accommodation plan be written.

When Jason transitioned to middle school, Mr. and Mrs. Jones talked with the counselor, who was also the Section 504 coordinator, about Jason's need for structured time and his difficulty with organizing and completing long projects. According to Mr. Jones, the sixth grade counselor could not locate Jason's individualized accommodation plan that had been written in elementary school. Mr. Jones could not recall if a new individual accommodation plan was written for Jason.

It was my understanding that if there were accommodations that needed to be made, they would be made. You know, it was really unclear to me what we had to do. It was my understanding that we had done everything. I think we were looking for a little more guidance than what was given... we are relying on their expertise.

During Jason's seventh grade year, Mr. and Mrs. Jones assumed that the teachers were making the accommodations and modifications for their son. When they met with the teachers during the fall parent teacher conferences, they brought up the individual accommodation plan.

They [the teachers] never knew that he was ever on a 504. We thought it would transfer from one grade to another. That's what surprised us. I guess we never pushed it in seventh grade. The 504 plan did not seem to do much in sixth grade. We did not see much happening with it so we just individually talked with the teachers. Conference time in seventh grade is way too short. We can't get

anything accomplished there. We were out of there before we could talk about anything.

Mrs. Anderson

Mrs. Anderson is married and has two children. She and her husband are professionals in the community and work full time. Mrs. Anderson describes her daughter, Tanya, as a sweet and loving child who can be very quiet and shy. Tanya has a beautiful singing voice and loves to dance. During her preschool years, she was a confident and outgoing child. Now that Tanya is in middle school, she is immature for her age and is hesitant to try new things.

Mrs. Anderson realized that Tanya was having difficulty with learning in the second grade when the teacher informed her that Tanya was not getting her work done and that they should punish her for it.

The thing that really stood out in my memory was when the teacher said that Tanya didn't get her work done today so don't let her watch television and don't let her do anything. She can bring her work in tomorrow. I said that we have a very important meeting tonight and she needs to come with us because she is only in first grade and she can't stay home. She [the teacher] lectured us about putting our children first.

Even though Tanya received tutoring help during the summer after second grade and extra help from the teacher in the third grade, it was not until her fourth grade year that the teacher suggested that Tanya be evaluated to determine if she had attention deficit disorder.

Over the next few months, Mrs. Anderson took Tanya to her physician who referred her to a psychologist. The psychologist told Mrs. Anderson about a research study at a nearby university that was studying children with learning problems. Mrs. Anderson contacted the psychology department at this university and signed Tanya up for

the study. The results of the study concluded that Tanya clearly had central auditory processing disorder and not attention deficit disorder.

School personnel determined that Tanya's central auditory processing disorder qualified her to receive special education services under speech and language disorders. An individualized education plan (IEP) was written to address her learning needs. Tanya remained on an IEP until midway through sixth grade when, after a re-evaluation, she was found ineligible for special education. Mrs. Anderson shared her thoughts.

I was told that, based on the results of the test, we are going to move her to a 504. She [referring to the case manager] said basically it is the same thing. Because she did so well, she no longer can be on an IEP. It is a regulation kind of thing. The plan was already typed up, they handed it to me, and I signed it. That was it. So I signed it. I wish I had never signed it.

Mrs. Anderson described the meeting to develop the individualized accommodation plan for Tanya.

The meeting itself is kind of overwhelming because you are with all of these people. They have a lot of power over my child. I don't remember the details. I think they caught me off guard. I wasn't prepared for it. I didn't know what a 504 was and I [pause] should have prepared for it.

Mrs. Anderson shared that she had met with Tanya's teachers on several occasions during the school year to talk about Tanya's low grades, poor organizational skills, and incomplete assignments. When asked if the teachers came up with any suggestions about how to help Tanya, Mrs. Anderson said,

No, no, no. They never did anything like that. It was sort of up to Tanya to get things handed in. Every time I suggested that we do something, I was just brushed off. They are too busy to deal with that.

Interviews with Teachers

Mrs. Kane

Mrs. Kane has been teaching in the field of education for over 20 years. She has a degree in music education as well as elementary education. Over the years, she has taught kindergarten through twelfth grade music, fourth grade, sixth grade in an elementary school setting, and technology. Currently, she teaches sixth grade in the middle school.

When asked about teaching at the middle school, she said,

I love it. I love the concept. I love the middle school concept. I love the sixth grade up here. They [the sixth grade students] belong up here. They fit perfectly. There is just a little bit more independence but it is still like they are in elementary school for most of the day.

There are currently 5 students who have an individualized accommodation plan and 10 students who have an individualized education plan. Of the students who have individual accommodation plans, three have a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity, one has muscle weakness on the left side, and one has anxiety and depression.

When asked about the transition from elementary school to middle school for students who have an individual accommodation plan, Mrs. Kane stated,

Well, it is not a real smooth process coming from elementary school to middle school. Oftentimes, it is like there is nobody in charge of these 504 kids. The elementary counselor, with a million other things to do, is kind of the head or is in charge of it. The classroom teacher is really the case manager for them. They sometimes get lost in the shuffle during the transition. Sometimes we wouldn't find them until we opened their cumulative file and find the 504 sheets in there. That was really a problem, but now when we have the transitions for the IEP kids we also have the counselors bring over all of the 504 sheets so that we know who they are before they come over. We still miss some but it is getting better.

Mrs. Kane shared that most students in middle school who are on individual accommodation plans were identified in elementary school. There are times when a student falls through the cracks. She described a situation about a student in her class who was having difficulty focusing in school. After perusing through the student's cumulative file, she located an individual accommodation plan that had been written when he was in the second grade. At that time, the student had been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactive disorder and was prescribed medication. Mrs. Kane called the student's mother and found out that she had discontinued the medication and was treating him with herbal supplements. During the spring parent teacher conference, Mrs. Kane mentioned to the mother that she was seeing some of the same behaviors that were noted when he was in second grade. She asked the mother if they could write up an individual accommodation plan so that the seventh grade teachers would be aware of his needs. The mother agreed and an individual accommodation plan was developed.

Mrs. Kane was asked to describe the review process of a student's individual accommodation plan. She stated,

We pull it [individualized accommodation plan] out during conference time and visit with the parents. We double check to see if it is still up-to-date, still current. We ask if they think that the plan is still correct for their child. We will check continuation and have the parent sign off on it.

Mrs. Kane was asked to address the accommodations and modifications that typically were written on an individual accommodation plan for students with attention deficit hyperactive disorder. She responded "takes Ritalin" is usually the only accommodation written on the plan. When asked if she thought that was sufficient, she stated,

You know it would be nice [to have more information] because they are all different kids. It is not just that they take medicine. They are all children with different abilities and needs. You figure it out after you have them for awhile... so and so needs to be in the corner... so and so needs to be up closer to me. If they [elementary school counselors] would be a little bit more thorough with that, it would be a lot better. During transition we take zillions of notes on kids with IEPs. It's the 504s that are the worst. [Long pause.] I never thought about that.

The topic of in-service training on the Section 504 process was discussed. When

Mrs. Kane was asked what types of in-service training she had received, she stated,

Nothing. The most that we have gotten is a new 504 plan form, a new template. I think there was a committee that met and rewrote the 504 form so that it was more current and more up-to-date. It is on our computer but I haven't had any training on it.

Mrs. Kane was asked to describe the roles of the parents, teachers, and the Section 504 coordinator in the Section 504 process. She described that parents need to be supportive for their child as well as the school. She believed that parents know what has worked best in the past and that it is important for them to pass that information on to the school staff. She also felt that parents should assist their child by checking the planner, making sure that homework assignments are completed, assisting with studying for tests, and helping them with long-term assignments.

Mrs. Kane shared that teachers should make recommendations to the parents about possible accommodations and classroom modifications. She also felt that it was the responsibility of the teachers to implement the accommodations and modifications in the classroom setting.

Mrs. Kane stated that she was unsure of the role of the Section 504 coordinator. She mentioned that time was a huge factor and that Section 504 coordinators may not

have time to meet with the Section 504 teams. When asked what she envisions a Section 504 coordinator's role to be, she stated,

If you had one person who was in charge of all the sixth grade 504s, seventh grade 504s, eighth grade 504s. They could be in charge of making sure they were re-written. They could talk to the parents and follow up with the kids to see how things are going. It would be nice if there could be just one person to check on those kids because they are the ones that fall through the cracks.

Mr. Towner

Mr. Towner has a degree in secondary education and history and has been teaching in the field of education for over 20 years. Currently, he teaches eighth grade history at the middle school level. He teaches approximately 100 students with 20 of them on individual accommodation plans. Mr. Towner said that the team he is on has the sound amplification systems installed in their classrooms, so his team typically has the students with hearing problems.

Mr. Towner is the father of two sons who were diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. The older son was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder while in the seventh grade, and the younger son was diagnosed with it when he was in the fourth grade. He attributed the earlier diagnosis of his younger son "because we were wiser and knew what to look for from our older son." Mr. Towner reflected on his experience as a parent of a middle school student with attention deficit disorder.

I do not mind talking about my son who hated school, especially middle school. He really didn't have anything nice to say about school at all. It was kind of a chore to get out of bed in the morning and now that he is in high school he is doing very well... he has kind of found his niche and he has found the coping skills that he needs to do well. We've gone through this year without any deficiency reports. First time we have done this since fifth or sixth grade. He was on the B honor roll and I would say that is a success.

Mr. Towner shared his thoughts about the communication between school personnel at the middle school.

What I think works best is to have set roles for the people who need to do the communication. You know, if you have a person that is supposed to take care of it [individualized accommodation plan], it seems to work out better. I think that the middle school setting helps...you have teams. With parent teacher conferences, we meet as a team. We get to see the parents and students and they get to see all of the teachers. They are usually done [with the conference] in 7 to 10 minutes and then they are able to meet with the allied teachers.

The interview shifted toward the issue of accommodating for students' needs. Mr. Towner stated that he felt comfortable making accommodations for most students on individual accommodation plans.

Some accommodations are just a matter of being on our team because of the sound system, and we are making accommodations for umpteen other students anyway so it is kind of adding one more to the list. Accommodations are just a regular part of your day. You kind of do them without even thinking. Some [accommodations] are a little more time consuming than others, like writing in a planner at the end of the day or printing out a special list of assignments for a student on a daily basis. For us to check a planner before they [the students] go out the door...it is not a hard thing to do but when you are dealing with 20 kids...it feels like a bother, like an add-on but we are willing to do it. Sometimes you can make all of the accommodations in the world and they [the students] just refuse to do it...that's where I get the most frustrated.

Mr. Towner shared that he has had little formal pre-service and in-service training on the Section 504 process. He shared his thoughts on the effectiveness of the Section 504 process.

If you get everyone going in the right direction, for the most part, they do work. Sometimes we don't get to see the success. It seems like an awful lot of this is done for them [referring to students receiving accommodations for attention deficit disorder] instead of with them. If this is all a gift, then you really don't have any kind of ownership.

Ms. Bowlin

Ms. Bowlin has a double major in elementary education and math. She completed graduate studies in math education and has a minor in counseling. Over the past 20 years, she has taught in several school districts at the elementary and middle school levels. She currently teaches five sections of math to approximately 90 eighth grade students at the middle school. Out of the 90 students, 6 have an individualized accommodation plan.

During Ms. Bowlin's second year of teaching for the school district, she was selected to attend a district-wide in-service on the Section 504 process.

...just a few of us were chosen to go and then no follow-up. So I have lost all of that information. Good meeting; but now that I have been here longer, it would mean a little more to me. I would have more to connect it to. Boy, there were some things that we should have known and we didn't. Not only because it is the law but who should be at a 504 [meeting] and who should not.

Ms. Bowlin was asked to share what types of disabilities would need to be present for a student to qualify for an individualized accommodation plan under Section 504. She stated that students with problems who have not been diagnosed and students with attention deficit disorder could be found eligible under Section 504. She also mentioned that some students who have been receiving special education services under the label of learning disabled or emotionally disturbed are placed on a Section 504 individual accommodation plan rather than on an individualized education plan.

It is like a weaning process [from special education], especially for those going into high school... there are just a few minor things but there is still a safety net. We don't want to send them to high school without some support.

Ms. Bowlin was asked to address how an individualized accommodation plan was developed and reviewed. She stated that she could not remember ever developing a plan but was willing to share the review process that is used in the school.

We have to review every 504 [plan] in the fall and make any modifications as necessary or do a formal review. We go through the form step by step. I like to wait a good month before we do this because I like to get to know the child a little bit in the classroom.

Ms. Bowlin stressed that it is important that students take responsibility for their learning. She stated that the biggest challenge is with parents who want to do the work for the child or who use the disability as a crutch for the child who does not want to do the work. She believes that students need to help themselves and to stand on their own two feet.

Working with parents of children who have an individual accommodation plan can be challenging. Ms. Bowlin shared an experience with a parent who has a child on an individual accommodation plan for attention deficit disorder.

We have a parent in the education field and she thinks she knows everything. Granted, she knows her child... about things we can't know through living with him. We see him more objectively and in a different way than she sees him. It seems like she wants to take control of the meeting, take over everything. She brought in a laundry list of accommodations. She had it all typed up like we were going to adopt it. Maybe it is her way to make it better and overcompensate for the disability. We actually have two parents like that this year. They are strong advocates for their children and, instead of being assertive, they are being aggressive and that turns us off. I really don't like being attacked. When you are being attacked you have the tendency to keep the peace. That gets to be the dynamics of those meetings. They are not helpful because it is about keeping the peace. Parents can be so tough.

When asked about the team's responsibility for writing accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities, Ms. Bowlin stated,

We have some very assertive teachers on our team. We flat out will say "no" on certain things. For instance, I will not agree to sign a planner. I will never remember to sign a planner. That is not my responsibility. That cannot even be on the table and the rest of the teachers will say "me too." If we put it in there we will be legally responsible for it.

Ms. Bowlin shared that with all of the different learning needs of students, it is not always about knowing what to do but having the time to sit down with a child and figure out what would help them.

The role of the Section 504 coordinator was brought up in the interview. Midway through the interview, Ms. Bowlin was unsure of who the Section 504 coordinator was for her school. Her initial response was that she thought she was the Section 504 coordinator. After several moments, she said that the special education teacher was the Section 504 coordinator, because at the beginning of the school year she gives the teams the list of students on individual accommodation plans. When I mentioned that the Section 504 coordinator was the school counselor, she stated,

Oh, I do know that. All he does is give us the 504s at the beginning of the year and he takes them back at the end of the year. He isn't at our meetings. He reminds us to update those 504s. These are my kids and I don't want him to do any more. As team leader, I see this as my responsibility.

Ms. Bowlin views the use of individual accommodation plans as an effective tool for teachers to meet the needs of students. She believes it is a step toward a solution to the student's problem and it forces people to talk about the needs of the student. She shared that since the plan is written in black and white, it helps keep everyone on the same page.

Interviews with Section 504 Coordinators

Mr. Flint

Mr. Flint has a master's degree in counseling and has worked for the school district for 11 years. He primarily performs counseling duties for two grade levels at the middle school. He is also the Section 504 coordinator for the entire school and oversees

approximately 30 individual accommodation plans. He shared that the majority of the individual accommodation plans are written for students who have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactive disorder. He also mentioned that there have been a few students with central auditory processing disorder and some other students who have medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, asthma).

When Mr. Flint was hired 11 years ago, he and other school counselors met with the special education director to go over Section 504 issues. He also has had numerous training opportunities on attention deficit disorder and Section 504. Mr. Flint addressed the issue of pre-service and in-service training of school personnel who develop and implement the individual accommodation plans of students with disabilities.

When I graduated, I never heard the word 504. Even the teachers don't know. I would do it differently if I were teaching out there [referring to the counseling and education programs at the university]. Everything is theory but then they throw you in here and you learn everything by fire. I would bring them in to see how things really are....

Mr. Flint stated that, during the first month of the school year, the teachers phone the parents to discuss their child's individual accommodation plan to determine if the accommodations and modifications are still appropriate. If the parents have concerns or if revisions need to be discussed, the team meets to develop appropriate accommodations for the student. Mr. Flint believes this is a good practice because the parents and teachers meet each other early on and establish positive communication. Mr. Flint was asked if all communication with parents was positive. He stated,

Parents are good, but sometimes they get misinformation. Most parents do not know what a 504 is and they get information from the medical profession or the university. The parent takes that like it is ammunition to use as carte blanche and think that they get whatever they want because that is what they were told. Nobody in the teaching profession got into it to not want to help kids, but some

people don't see it like that. We [referring to the team] know that this will work better so that is what we are going to do. Some parents will call with a very unreasonable request. Well, we do not have to honor it just because a parent wants it.

Mr. Flint gave an example of a parent who received information from a social worker in the medical field about possible accommodations that could be made for the student's disability. He stated that the parent wanted the teachers to make all of the 60 accommodations for her child. He informed the parent that the teachers simply could not make that many accommodations.

Mr. Flint shared another incident with me regarding a time when a student was failing a class. According to Mr. Flint, a parent came to a team meeting and said that it was the teacher's fault for his child's failing grade and if this were a business, the teacher would get fired. Mr. Flint stated that having an individual accommodation plan does not guarantee that a student will get straight A's. "Most students on individual accommodation plans will have to work harder than their peers and will need parental support with homework and studying for tests."

Mr. Flint was asked about the types of accommodations and modifications that were written on individual accommodation plans for students with attention deficit disorder or central auditory processing disorder and the receptiveness of teachers to follow through on the plan. Mr. Flint stated,

Math is the area that we sometimes have to cut down some of the problems. The teachers are okay with it, but I think 10 years ago it was harder. It is better than it was 10 years ago. Now, this is just a normal thing to them and they know that it is legally binding just like an IEP.

Mr. Flint shared his thoughts about the role of parents and teachers in the Section 504 process. In regard to the role of parents, he stated, "Let us get their roles equal with

ours, tell them what the whole process is about, tell them everybody works together, kind of work as a consensus....”

Mr. Flint thinks that the Section 504 process is different at every school in the district. Over the past few years, his role has shifted from being the case manager of every student on an individual accommodation plan to more of an overseer of the process. He believes that the student’s team is taking more ownership in the process. He also mentioned that he is available to the teams if they encounter a new issue or a problem regarding Section 504.

Mr. Hanson

Prior to becoming a school counselor, Mr. Hanson taught Spanish to seventh grade students for eight years. During this time, his superintendent approached him and suggested that he pursue a degree in counseling because he connected so well with students. Mr. Hanson spoke of his transition from teaching to school counseling by saying, “It took me a long time to give up the teaching part of it. I made such a connection with my students. They were mine and I just bonded with them so well.”

Mr. Hanson stated that, at the sixth grade level in his school, each of the eight classrooms has approximately two students who have individual accommodation plans. Approximately half of the plans are for students who have a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity. The other plans are written for medical conditions (e.g., asthma, severe allergies) or students who are moved out of special education. When asked about students who have central auditory processing disorder, he stated that those students typically are in special education and have an individual accommodation plan written to address their needs.

Mr. Hanson described his role and responsibilities as the Section 504 coordinator for the middle school where he works.

I don't know if I am a 504 coordinator or if the district has a 504 coordinator. I would be the person right above the teachers...to be concerned about 504s and to make sure that they are done. My job is to make sure that what they are doing is right and they are meeting the needs of the student and they are doing what they say they are doing. Am I responsible, as part of my duty, to write 504s? No.

In terms of receiving information on the Section 504 process, Mr. Hanson shared that he has attended three or four regional trainings as well as two or three district sponsored in-services. When asked if the teachers attend the same trainings, Mr. Hanson stated that they are not afforded the same opportunity as the counselors because of time constraints.

Mr. Hanson was asked to describe the middle school team as it relates to the Section 504 process. He stated that, in the sixth grade, there are four classrooms. Each classroom has one teacher with a shared special education teacher. The classroom teachers are the case managers for students on individual accommodation plans. Mr. Hanson clarified that every middle school in his district has a "unique way of doing it." He gave an example of one Section 504 coordinator at a different middle school in the district who called the parents to schedule the meetings and actually wrote up the plan. Mr. Hanson shared that he was unsure of the best way to facilitate the Section 504 process. He felt that the teachers were better able to write the individual accommodation plans because they were the ones who actually work with the students.

Mr. Hanson was asked about the involvement of the parents in the development of the individual accommodation plan. He stated,

... certainly the parents should be involved but not to the point where the parents are going to say that we are going to do all of these things. You know, come in with a list of 20 things that we are going to do. The parents may say, "How about this?," and they [the teachers] say, "That is not possible" or "We don't have the financial means to do that." It is mostly an exchange and they come up with the best way... kind of a group decision.

Mr. Hanson stated that the role of the parents should be as an equal partner with the teacher and that they should work as a team as they try to determine how to make the student successful. The teachers and parents need to work together to determine what accommodations will help the student. He also believes that parents need to act as an advocate for their child. If something is not working or something does not seem right, they need to communicate it to the team so that it can be discussed.

When asked about how individual accommodations plans are reviewed, Mr. Hanson stated that it varies by school. Some teams review the plans in the fall and some teams review the plans in the spring. Mr. Hanson shared that he requires the teachers to review and rewrite every individual accommodation plan by the fall parent teacher conferences. He mentioned that, in middle school, the plan is typically continued from year to year.

Mr. Hanson shared,

There's no guide that says exactly how to do this and so everybody has taken on how they interpret how to do things. There is a big-time gray area so that is why every school deals with it differently. The bottom line is if a school and the team work together then it should be an easy process. It should not be difficult at all.

Mr. Hanson discussed the issue of transferring individual accommodation plans from elementary school to middle school. He stated that, in the spring, the middle school counselors set up a designated time to meet with the specialists and counselor from the elementary schools. The individual accommodation plans are typically shared from

counselor to counselor, unlike individualized education plans, where the information is shared between specialists from each school. Mr. Hanson stated that some parents call him to set up a meeting to discuss their child's individual accommodation plan as well as to discuss their concerns about the transition to middle school. He shares the information received from the parents with the team and asks them to continue with the accommodations that worked the previous year.

Mr. Hanson was asked to comment on the effectiveness of individual accommodation plans for students. He stated,

If everybody participates in the 504, that is what the 504 is for. Everyone has to buy into it. You also need the parent and the student to buy into it. I think you could solve a lot of problems if teachers actually had the time where they could meet with the parent and prepare for the 504.

Mr. Matthews

Mr. Matthews began his career as a teacher in an elementary school in a neighboring state. During his four years of teaching, he worked with the school counselor and was impressed with her ability to work with students. Mr. Matthews decided to pursue a master's degree in counseling and has been working as a school counselor for the past 14 years. Of the 14 years in the district, he has spent the last two years at the middle school level.

Mr. Matthews shared that he did not remember learning about Section 504 when he was in the counseling program at his university. He stated that the school district is very good about providing in-service training about issues like Section 504. If necessary, he utilizes the expertise of the special education director, special education coordinator, and school psychologist for problems that may arise about Section 504.

According to Mr. Matthews, there are approximately nine students per team who have an individual accommodation plan under Section 504, but he believes there could be more. When asked to expand further, he stated,

Sometimes teachers get so busy. They have so much on their plate that 504s are not the first thing on their mind. I'm not sure how to explain it. It is looked at as another thing to do. Teachers are overwhelmed. That is more of it than anything, not more important.

Mr. Matthews shared that the majority of individual accommodations plans are written for students who have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity. Over the past few years, there has been an increase in individual accommodation plans for students who are leaving special education services. Other disabilities or conditions that individual accommodation plans are written for include central auditory processing disorder, asthma, diabetes, and English as Second Language learners.

Mr. Matthews was asked to describe his role as a Section 504 coordinator. He shared that his role is to set up the Section 504 procedures for the school and to equally divide students on individual accommodation plans between the two teams. Once he decides who will be placed on the teams, he organizes and places the plans into files for each team. He also provides each team of teachers a "cheat sheet" that includes all of the modifications and accommodations for the students who have an individual accommodation plan. Mr. Matthews shared that it is important for Section 504 coordinators and administrators to be advocates for parents as well as for students. He shared that sometimes he will find himself between parents and teachers, but he always focuses on what needs to be done so that kids can learn.

One of the procedures that has been recently implemented is that teachers are highly encouraged to meet with the parents when the team reviews the student's individual accommodation plan. Teachers are also required to review the plan during the first quarter of the school year. Regarding the review process, Mr. Matthews stated, "What good is a 504 if it is done at the end of the school year? I encourage them to do it during parent teacher conferences when the parents are right there."

Each middle school team consists of four core teachers representing math, English, science, and social studies. Each team chooses one person who assumes responsibility for reviewing and rewriting the individual accommodation plans for students. In addition to the core teachers, a special education teacher is also on the team to address the needs of students on individual education plans. When asked about the students who have moved from an individual education plan to an individual accommodation plan, Mr. Matthews shared that the involvement of the special education teacher or other specialists is determined by available time and their willingness to go above and beyond their large caseloads to provide services to students who are not in special education.

Mr. Matthews addressed the importance of the role of parents in the Section 504 process. He believes that high expectations from parents and parental involvement are important to the academic success of a child. He shared that not all parents understand the purpose of the individual accommodation plan that was written for their child and that training on the Section 504 process for parents would be valuable. He also believes that parents should be advocates for their child. He shared, "This is a way that they know that services are being done for their child. How many middle school kids are going to

advocate for themselves and for teachers to make sure that they are getting what they need?"

Summary

In Chapter III, I described the experiences and perceptions of 10 individuals who are connected to the Section 504 process in the middle school setting. The first four vignettes were of parents of children with either attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder and their experiences from initial diagnosis in elementary school to the development of an individual accommodation plan in middle school. The second group of vignettes was of three middle school teachers who have had extensive teaching experience at the middle school level. The third group of vignettes included three Section 504 coordinators who also serve as counselors in their designated school. Within the vignettes, I used narrative description supported by direct quotations to describe the participants' understanding of the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans for students.

Three categories and seven themes are detailed in Chapter IV, along with a discussion of the literature. The contextual and intervening conditions that influence the phenomenon are provided along with the strategies and consequences. Three propositions that emerged from the data are presented.

CHAPTER IV

CATEGORIES, THEMES, AND THEORETICAL PROPOSITIONS WITH REFERENCE TO THE LITERATURE

This study is “grounded” in the data from interviews of four parents of middle school age children with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder, three middle school teachers, and three Section 504 coordinators. Included in this chapter are the three major categories and seven themes that emerged from the data as well as a discussion of the themes with reference to the literature. The data consist of transcriptions of the interviews from the participants. The quotations from the data are cited with a letter representing the participant group (T represents Teacher, P represents Parent, and C represents Section 504 coordinator) and a number representing whether it is the first, second, third, or fourth participant of the group. The third number in the code represents the first or second interview. For example, T1-1 refers to the first teacher interviewed and interview number one, P2-2 refers to the second parent interviewed and interview number two, C3-1 refers to the third Section 504 coordinator interviewed and interview number one.

After the categories, themes, and discussion with reference to the literature, I present the data in an axial coding paradigm. The central phenomenon is identified as well as the context in which it is embedded. In addition, the strategies, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences of the development and implementation of the

Section 504 process are discussed. Toward the end of the chapter, three propositions are provided.

During the open coding process, three major categories emerged from the data. These categories were named (a) Knowledge, (b) The Section 504 Process, and (c) Collaboration. I discuss the three categories and the subsequent themes that developed within each category.

Category I: Knowledge

The first category, “knowledge,” refers to the participants’ understanding of the Section 504 process, the understanding of accommodations and modification made for students with a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder, and the amount of training received about the Section 504 process. Under the “knowledge” category, three themes developed:

1. There is a lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities.
2. Parents feel that they know their child best but struggle with not knowing what accommodations will be allowed in the school.
3. Teachers have had little to no training on the Section 504 process.

Theme One: There Is a Lack of Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities

The research data revealed that the parents and teachers did not have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of other individuals involved in the development and implementation of individual accommodation plans. One parent shared his perception about the role of the Section 504 coordinator by saying, “I thought he was going to monitor Jason’s progress or make some recommendations as to what would help

him. Of course, we never heard anything. The only interaction we had was when we initiated it” (P3-1).

In a separate interview, one teacher shared her thoughts about the role of the Section 504 coordinator. She stated, “All he does is gives us the copies of the 504s at the beginning of the year and he takes them back at the end of the year” (T3-1). Another teacher talked about the role of the Section 504 coordinator at her school by saying,

The counselor for sixth grade would be our 504 coordinator. I think that their only role is to get all the papers and divide them up into the classroom. I think that is all that they do is to make sure that 504s are separated between the classrooms and that they are all even.... (T2-1)

Two out of the four parents and one of the three teachers did not know who the Section 504 coordinator was for their middle school. When asked who was the Section 504 coordinator for her school, Ms. Bowlin replied,

Oh, I don't know who that is. As far as I am concerned, it is all on my back. At the beginning of the year, this must be part of the 504 coordinator, they list the kids on 504 and the specialist always has that meeting. (T3-1)

Mr. Towner addressed the importance of having defined roles and responsibilities in the development and implementation of individual accommodation plans.

What I think works best is to have set roles for the people who need to do the communication. You know, if you have a person that's supposed to take care of it, it seems to work out better than to kind of lead it by chance or the hit and miss thing because sometimes it doesn't get done. (T1-1)

All three of the Section 504 coordinators shared that, in the past, they were responsible for developing and writing individual accommodation plans for students.

Over the past few years, the Section 504 case manager responsibilities have shifted to the teachers who are now responsible for the development and implementation of the students' plans. One Section 504 coordinator described his previous responsibilities in the

Section 504 process by saying, "I wrote every 504. I was at every 504 meeting. I'm trying to get them [referring to the teachers] to do it. It was a weaning process..." (C1-1). Mr. Hanson described his Section 504 duties as being the "person right above the teachers" who is responsible for assuring that the Section 504 individual accommodation plans are completed by the teachers. He also shared that it is not his responsibility to actually write the plans. Another Section 504 coordinator described his role and responsibility in the Section 504 process.

I guess my role, as a 504 coordinator, is to make sure that everyone is pretty much doing the same thing as far as 504s at this school. I try to set up the 504 procedures...and give each team a folder of who their 504 kids are going to be.... (C3-1)

The Section 504 coordinators and teachers shared their thoughts on the role of parents in the Section 504 process. The Section 504 coordinators believed that parents of children on individual accommodation plans should be advocates for their child.

...just being an advocate for their child. This is a way that they know that services are being done for their child. How many middle school kids are going to be advocates for themselves? (C3-1)

To me the parent would be an equal partner with the teacher trying to resolve how to make the student successful everyday by the accommodations that they make. I see the parents' role as an advocate for their son or daughter. If something isn't working or something doesn't seem right, let somebody know...the parents have to be active participants. (C2-1)

Teachers also believed that parents should assist their child by checking the planner, making sure that homework assignments are completed, and helping the child with long-term assignments.

[Parents] need to be the support for their child and support for the school. They know their child and need to help us out in terms of what has worked well in the past and to give a little extra help at home. (T2-1)

*Theme Two: Parents Feel That They Know Their Child Best
but Struggle With Not Knowing What Accommodations
Will Be Allowed in the School*

The data from the interviews revealed that parents were able to identify areas of concern about their child. Teachers viewed parents as being knowledgeable about their child and hoped that parents would share the information with them, but the parents did not feel that the majority of the teachers welcomed the information they had to offer. The parents described the potential academic challenges or problems that their child most likely would face during the school year.

He is very aware of himself and not aware of others socially... he doesn't notice any cues from other people and he has been invasive and impulsive. If he sees something that he wants, then he touches it. (P2-1)

He doesn't prepare for tests; sometimes it's homework and he isn't able to process the information like others so he can't study like others. There was a time when he got an F with a big project. He never turned it in on time. She gave him weeks and then when he turned in something it was totally wrong and she gave him no credit. (P3-1)

Tanya is a neat, very loving kid. She has always been concerned about other people, how they are feeling. She has a beautiful singing voice. She loves to dance but that is stymied by the fact that she can't remember well and she will sometimes forget what comes next. She is always losing her papers. I don't know how because she never throws anything away but she loses things right and left. If something is hard, she simply won't do it. She has to be taken step by step through the process. (P4-1)

Mrs. Dorn described her thoughts about eliciting teacher input regarding what modifications and accommodations would be appropriate to write in the individual accommodation plan.

We kept saying it would be helpful to us if you just check to see if he filled out his planner. All we wanted was that he wouldn't miss any assignments so that he could get the grades he deserved. But they wouldn't do it. (P2-1)

Mr. Jones described his feelings of determining what types of accommodations would be appropriate for his son.

We don't want to make it too easy for him because we know that he can do things. We wanted him to do as much as he could. I guess it is hard to know when to make it hard or not. I think we were looking for a little more guidance than what was given because we could have narrowed the focus a little more. I mean we are relying on their expertise in that manner. We know where he lacks but we don't know about getting teachers to help him or getting teachers to follow through. (P3-1)

*Theme Three: Teachers Have Had Little to No Training
on the Section 504 Process*

The third theme that emerged from the "knowledge" category addressed the issue of pre-service and in-service training on Section 504 for teachers and Section 504 coordinators. The three teachers and three Section 504 coordinators reported that they received no training on the Section 504 process in their pre-service teacher preparation programs. Ms. Bowlin stated, "I don't even remember hearing about those [referring to 504 individual accommodation plans]." Mr. Flint shared his thoughts on the pre-service training he received regarding Section 504. He stated, "When I graduated, I never heard the word 504 out there [referring to the university's education and counseling programs]" (C1-1).

In addition to the lack of pre-service training on Section 504, teachers had limited opportunities to attend in-service trainings on the topic. Mrs. Kane shared her opinion.

The most that we have gotten is a new 504 plan form, a new 504 template. I haven't had any training on it at all. I think I knew more about it in elementary school when I was on the TAT...but that's 10 years ago. I haven't seen anything on 504s in middle school. (T2-1)

One of the three teachers reported that four years ago she attended a district sponsored in-service training on Section 504. She shared her thoughts about the training she received.

There were just a few of us that were chosen to go. And then no follow-up, so I have lost all of that information. Good meeting; but now that I have been here longer, it would mean a little more to me. I would have more to connect it to. I wish I could go back to it. Boy, there were some things that we should have known and we didn't. Not only because it is the law but just who should be at the 504 [meeting] and who shouldn't. (T3-1)

In contrast, all three of the Section 504 coordinators have attended several training sessions about the legal issues of Section 504 as well as the development and implementation of the individual accommodation plan for students who are found eligible under Section 504.

I've probably attended three or four different trainings. The Office of Civil Rights out of Denver sent someone here. I went through three or four of those where it was a day-long training. They go through the whole process. They went over everything from how it differs from 94-142 to what qualifies for a 504. We were given an issue and then expected to write up a 504 plan. (C2-1)

Discussion of Category I: Knowledge

The data in this study suggest that there is a lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the Section 504 process. The interview data show discrepancies of an understanding of personal roles as well as lack of understanding of the roles of others in the Section 504 process. There is little written about the clarification of the responsibilities and roles of parents and teachers in the Section 504 process, because this is often a school district decision. To muddy the waters even more, staff from each school within the district interpret district policies on Section 504 and apply those policies to their own situation.

The roles and responsibilities of Section 504 coordinators are defined in the literature. Richards (1994) outlined the responsibilities of the Section 504 coordinator by suggesting that they are responsible to develop and maintain a Section 504 program, distribute the necessary documentation and information to all campuses, and oversee the progress of all Section 504 committees. The Section 504 coordinator is also responsible for handling parent complaints, coordinating responses to Office of Civil Rights investigations, and making necessary arrangements for Section 504 due process hearings. The Section 504 coordinator attends trainings on Section 504 and provides in-services and workshops to other staff members within the district.

The data from this study support that Section 504 coordinators and teachers view the roles of parents in the Section 504 process differently. Section 504 coordinators believed that parents should advocate for their child, and teachers believed that parents should assist their child in following through with homework assignments.

The second theme that emerged from the data suggested that parents feel that they know their child best but are unsure with knowing what accommodations will be allowed in school. The literature supports that parents of children with disabilities have a wealth of information and experiences that can be shared with teachers (O'Shea, O'Shea, Algozzine, & Hammitte, 2001; Tiegerman-Farber & Radziewicz, 1998; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). They have an insight about how their child learns that should be taken into account within the instructional curriculum (Wiese, 1992). Fowler (1992) points out that parents of children who have a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder appear to be more knowledgeable than teachers and administrators about making recommendations for appropriate classroom accommodations and modifications. The data in this study

suggest that parents know their child's strengths and academic needs but struggle with knowing what accommodations or modifications would be appropriate in the middle school setting. The Section 504 committee should utilize parent knowledge so that an appropriate individual accommodation plan can be developed for the student with a disability and implementation can be done within the school setting (Miller & Newbill, 1998).

The third theme that emerged from the data addressed the issue of pre-service and in-service training on Section 504. The data from the interviews of teachers and Section 504 coordinators suggest that not one of them recalled learning about Section 504 in their pre-service training programs. All of the Section 504 coordinators reported that they have received extensive training on the Section 504 process; however, only one teacher had the opportunity to attend a workshop on the Section 504 process. In a comprehensive literature review of 21 studies conducted by Scott, Vitale, and Masten (1998), general education teachers at all grade levels were found to be open to making instructional adaptations and classroom modification for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. They were less positive about the reasonableness or feasibility of implementing these adaptations. General education teachers identified three significant barriers to effective implementation of adaptations for students with disabilities. The barriers identified were lack of training in skills, knowledge, and limited administrative support.

In 1991, a joint policy memorandum was issued that was intended to clarify state and local responsibility under federal law for meeting the needs of children with attention deficit disorder in the school environment (Davila et al., 1991). The joint policy

memorandum recognized that general education teachers and other school personnel need training to develop a greater understanding of the needs of children with attention deficit disorder. The training also needs to address the adaptations that can be used in the general education classroom to help these children learn. Reid, Maag, Vasa, and Wright (1994) concur that, to meet Section 504 mandates, general education teachers need access to additional training on the 504 process and development of appropriate accommodation for students who have attention deficit disorder.

Blazer (1999) advocated that general education teachers need to have comprehensive in-service training and knowledge about peer collaboration as they develop and implement individual accommodation plans for students. She concluded that the training should give teachers an opportunity to reflect on their own values and beliefs regarding the rights of students with attention problems and include information on databased evaluation systems to document the effectiveness of implemented interventions.

Category II: The Section 504 Process

Category II refers to the development and implementation of individual accommodation plans for students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder. Two themes emerged under this category:

1. The development, implementation, and periodic review of individual accommodation plans are inconsistent.
2. Transition of students on individual accommodation plans from one grade to another is often problematic.

*Theme One: The Development, Implementation, and Periodic Review
of Individual Accommodation Plans Are Inconsistent*

The data from the study revealed that the development of initial individual accommodation plans is typically written in elementary school. On occasion, middle school teachers will need to develop an individual accommodation plan for new students who have moved into the district, are being transitioned from special education to Section 504, or have not previously been on an individual accommodation plan. One parent shared her experience when an individual accommodation plan was written for her son midway through the first half of the sixth grade semester. She stated,

Sixth grade was his first year on a 504. They had decided that he had really lost control and put him on a 504. I learned after the fact that they put him on a 504. There never was a meeting; it was just the teachers. I think it is a systems issue. It's put on teachers' laps and they are told to deal with it. They have no training and they don't know what they are doing. It comes across as a real bother to them. (P2-1)

Another parent shared her thoughts about meetings she has had with teachers to discuss her son's accommodations. She shared,

When I walk into the 504 planning sessions, all three years that we have been out there, the initial one and the subsequent two, they [the team] look at me and ask me what do I want? I am thinking, how am I supposed to know what I want? I know what I want but how do I know what I can have? (P1-1)

Mrs. Anderson talked about her experience at an individual education plan (IEP) meeting when her daughter was moved from an IEP to an individual accommodation plan:

They said to me that, based on the results of the tests, we are going to move her to a 504. She [the case manager] said basically it is the same thing. They told me that because she did so well she no longer could be on an IEP. It's a regulation kind of thing. It [the individual accommodation plan] was already typed up, they handed it to me, and I signed it. I wished I had never signed it. (P4-1)

The parents revealed their thoughts about teachers following through on the accommodations and modifications written on a student's individual accommodation plan.

Not having to handwrite assignments and the extra time for written reports are accommodations on his 504. Not that they actually conform to that but when I holler about it they do. There was an incident this year with his history teacher. Tyler was paired up with another kid who had ADHD and they were supposed to do a project together and the kid never showed up. Tyler needed more time to do the assignment and the teacher said that's fine as long as I have it on Monday. (P1-2)

I think if the team got together and really had a focus on a certain child and the accommodations, they could do an awesome job but they have to be committed to it and feel like it would benefit [the student] in the long run. (P2-1)

Two teachers shared their thoughts about making accommodations for students.

Some accommodations are just a matter of being on our team because of the sound system. We are making umpteen accommodations for other students anyway so it is kind of adding one more to the list. For the most part, accommodations are just a regular part of the day. You kind of do them without even thinking. There are some [accommodations] that are more time consuming, like writing in a planner or printing out a special list of assignments for a student on a daily basis... or for us to sit down and check a planner before they go out the door. It is not a hard thing to do... but when you are dealing with 20 other kids in the room it feels like a bother, but we are willing to do it and that is not a problem. (T1-2)

We have the homework hotline. That would be the parents' responsibility to call the hotline so there doesn't need to be a planner. It can be bypassed. The other thing that we will do is to provide students with homework sheets. We prefer not to do that because that becomes our responsibility. (T3-1)

Typically, the teacher who assumes the case management responsibilities for the individual accommodation plans will be responsible to rewrite an existing plan. The data revealed that the periodic review of the individual accommodation plan in the school district has been done a number of ways. Some schools review the plan at parent teacher conferences while some schools update the plan and mail it to the parents for their

signature. The level of input from parents also varies depending on the team. One parent stated, "On February 20, 2003, I got a copy of a revised 504 plan in the mail. Nobody had ever contacted me or talked to me about it other than at conferences" (P2-1). Another parent stated, "They [referring to the team members] wrote down the accommodations but I didn't have any input" (P4-1). One of the teachers reflected on the Section 504 meeting.

We don't really rewrite, we revisit [the individual accommodation plan] at the first conference time. We pull it out and visit with the parent and double check. Are you still doing this? Does this seem current? We update the medicine if there is medicine... and if they [the parents] think that the 504 plan is still correct for their child, we'll check continuation and have them sign off on it. (T2-1)

Another teacher described how she updates the individual accommodation plan.

She stated,

We have to review every 504 in the fall and make any modifications as necessary or to say as is but we do a formal review. There's a form that you fill out and we go through the form step by step. Go over all of the accommodations. I like to wait a good month before we do this so we get to know the child a little bit in the classroom. We just go over how they are doing, what kind of challenges they are having and most of the time there are modifications and we work toward student responsibility. (T3-1)

*Theme Two: Transition of Students on Individual Accommodation Plans
From One Grade to Another Is Often Problematic*

The data from the study revealed that parents and teachers share similar concerns about transferring individual accommodation plans during the transition process. This process may be from elementary school to middle school, from grade to grade, or from middle school to high school. Two parents shared their experiences.

We thought it would transfer from one grade to another. That's what surprised us. I guess we never pushed it in seventh grade. The 504 plan didn't do much in sixth grade. We didn't see much happening with it so we just individually talked with the teachers. (P3-1)

Usually in the fall right after school starts they review the 504. I don't know if it is school specific because this is not the way it went in elementary school. At the end of seventh grade, someone came up with a really good idea that they have one of the paras check his planner at night and make sure that he had his assignments written down and that he had everything that he needed to do his homework. That came to work better. Before the beginning of the next school year, I asked the team to do the same thing as last year and I was told no; they couldn't do that. They didn't have the manpower to do that and it took too much time out of their day.... (P1-1)

Mrs. Kane shared that the transition of students on individual accommodation plans from elementary to middle school is not a smooth process. She stated,

It's not a real smooth process, to be honest with you, coming from elementary to middle school. Oftentimes it's like there is nobody in charge of these 504 kids. The classroom teacher is really the case manager for them but they sometimes get lost in the shuffle during the transition from elementary to middle school. (T2-1)

Ms. Bowlin addressed moving students from an IEP to an individual accommodation plan prior to transition to high school.

...if we want to take them off the IEP and lessen their support, we will put them on a 504. It is like a weaning process, especially for those going on to high school...there are just a few minor things but there is still a safety net. We don't want to send them to high school without some support. (T3-1)

Discussion of Category II: The Section 504 Process

A major difference between Section 504 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is that Section 504 is "intended to establish a 'level playing field' by eliminating barriers that exclude persons with disabilities, whereas IDEA is remedial, often requiring the provision of programs and services" (Rosenfeld, n.d., What Is the Difference Between Section 504 and IDEA?, ¶1).

Funding for Section 504 and IDEA is another issue for school districts. School districts receive federal funding for students who are eligible for special education

services under IDEA. This is not the case for students served under Section 504.

Rosenfeld (n.d.) suggested that, with the lack of financial support for students on Section 504 plans, “schools often drag their feet in providing needed services to children” and “it is difficult to obtain the administrative and judicial support needed to secure compliance” (What Is the Difference Between Section 504 and IDEA?, ¶2).

Another issue raised regarding the difference between IDEA and Section 504 is what statute covers whom. The definition of a disability under Section 504 is much broader in scope than the definition under IDEA. IDEA provides special education services to children between the ages of 3-21; whereas, Section 504 covers the person’s lifespan and safeguards the rights in many areas of their lives, including employment, public access to buildings, transportation, and education (deBettencourt, 2002). All students who qualify under IDEA are also covered under Section 504, but not all students who are eligible for protection under Section 504 are eligible for services under IDEA (Rosenfeld, n.d.). This often creates confusion by those involved in the identification process.

The flexibility of procedures of IDEA and Section 504 is another issue. There seems to be more “gray area” when addressing Section 504 procedural requirements for school personnel. Schools may offer less assistance and monitoring with Section 504 because there are fewer regulations by the federal government, especially in terms of compliance (deBettencourt, 2002).

Students with disabilities who do not qualify for special education services but are eligible under Section 504 must be afforded a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) through a designated process involving referral, evaluation, eligibility determination,

accommodation plan development, and periodic re-evaluation (Smith, 2002). Since Section 504 applies to all institutions receiving federal financial assistance, public schools are obligated to provide appropriate accommodations and services to eligible students. To assure that students receive the appropriate services and accommodations, schools need to have established policies and procedures outlining the Section 504 process (Smith, 2002).

In a study by Katsiyannis and Conderman (1994), a survey instrument was mailed to all state special educators to determine state practices that addressed the educational needs of students with disabilities under Section 504. Results of the study found that fewer than half of the 50 states had established policies and/or guidelines on Section 504 and no data on students identified under Section 504 had been collected by any state. They concluded that the lack of state involvement was derived from indirect state responsibility for Section 504 mandates, the development of Section 504 policies was the responsibility of the local school district, the Office of Civil Rights is the federal monitoring agency, and Section 504 is a complex issue.

After a student is found eligible under Section 504, the Section 504 committee is responsible for developing “a plan for modifying instruction, curricular content, communication, expectations, rules and consequences, demands on the student, the environment, materials, and/or physical setting—all undertaken to accommodate the unique needs of the student” (Miller & Newbill, 1998, p. 32).

The Section 504 committee must meet periodically to review individual accommodation plans for students. A meeting to review the individual accommodation plan should take place annually or more often if the committee deems it necessary. The

committee should review the data collected to determine if the accommodations listed on the individual accommodation plan are effective. Miller and Newbill (1998) proposed that data collected by classroom teachers can include “grades, anecdotal reports from teachers and parents, assignment notebooks, agenda books, student anecdotal reports, material from a student’s portfolio, in-class test results, attendance, tardiness, and number of disciplinary incidents” (p. 47).

Blazer (1999) recommended a three-step process for creating individual accommodation plans for students with attention deficit disorder. She suggested using a collaborative model enlisting input from students’ parents, the teachers, and the student in the development of the student’s individual accommodation plan. The three steps are comprised of parent and student education, collaboration, and agreement; teacher input and agreement; and parent training for Section 504 follow-up, coordination, and advocacy. Using a compiled list of strategies organized into physical, instructional, and behavioral accommodations, parents are asked to choose the accommodations and modification they believe will help their child in the classroom. The teacher meets with the student to help them think about how general education teachers can help them learn. After the teacher and student develop a list of appropriate accommodations and modifications, a “certificate of accommodations” is written for the student. Blazer concluded that, when students are involved in the problem-solving process, they begin to develop self-advocacy skills.

The second step in the development of an individual accommodation plan involves obtaining input from the teachers. This input addresses what is working and what target areas need to be tackled. This step in the process results in a systematic and

comprehensive written list of accommodations and modifications that is reviewed periodically.

The third step of the process enlists parent participation. Parents formally send the list of classroom accommodations, along with a rating scale that assesses effectiveness of individual accommodations, to school personnel. A parent cover letter and copy of the "Clarification Policy" (U.S. Department of Education, 1991) are sent along with the accommodation list so that educators have an explanation for the request of the individual accommodation plan. After teachers complete the rating scale, the teacher and Section 504 coordinator recompile a written consensus of priority accommodations and disseminate it to the appropriate school personnel. A copy of the finalized individual accommodation plan is placed in the student's permanent file.

Category III: Collaboration

Category III refers to the beliefs and attitudes of parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators as well as the written and oral communication between those involved in the Section 504 process. Two themes emerged under this category:

1. Barriers to collaborative efforts between parents and teachers exist.
2. Communication between parents and teachers is often tenuous.

Theme One: Barriers to Collaborative Efforts Between Parents and Teachers Exist

Two primary barriers to collaborative efforts between parents and teachers emerged from the data. These barriers are perceptions or beliefs of individuals involved in the Section 504 process and lack of time.

All participants were asked to respond to the following statement: "A major purpose of Section 504 is for teachers to level the playing field for students with disabilities." Nine out of the 10 participants generally agreed with the statement. One parent shared her thoughts.

We don't necessarily need to make things easier for these kids but we need to make it possible. They need to learn how to deal with their disabilities because it is a life-long thing for most of them. You are not doing them any favors by giving their education to them but you have to make it possible for them to succeed at least partially. (P1-1)

After some thought, one teacher disagreed with the statement and explained her position by saying,

Kids are not all the same... I think it is about helping them to be as successful as they can be... so that is not level. It's not about teaching to the middle; it's not about this one level and that everybody is at it and you are trying to get everyone to it. People are all over the place and, to me, it is about helping them to be the best that they can. (T3-3)

Parents and teachers shared their thoughts about trying to find the balance between enabling students and accommodating for their needs.

My expectations are very low for her when I compare her to her friends who are "A" students. You know, we can't even go to a movie and leave the kids alone for a couple of hours. It's not even possible. There are a lot of things I couldn't give her to do. (P4-1)

Probably the biggest challenge is with parents. I am thinking of a specific child now. Parents who want to do the work for the child, who use the disability as a crutch and excuse... the challenge is how much is disability and how much is enabling, and communicating that to the parents. (T3-1)

Mrs. White shared her thoughts about Tyler's sixth grade teacher who had a child with attention deficit hyperactive disorder.

She never made him feel like it was his fault or that he was lazy or any of that. She kept saying you have to try a little bit harder or I know this is hard for you.

She never blamed him. She never said that I have to make him do his homework. Well, he does his homework all the time but he just doesn't turn it in. (P1-1)

The issue of lack of time was another barrier that emerged from the data. Parents shared that they were told that there simply was not enough time in a teacher's schedule to provide some of the accommodations that were suggested. One parent talked about having her daughter's planner signed by teachers.

I have a friend who lives in another city and at the end of the day the teacher goes through and checks everything that should be done in the planner. If it is not done then there is a big red stamp that is put on the planner. I have asked for that and the teachers said that would be a lot of trouble for them to do that; but, on the other hand, when I go to meetings, they know exactly what is missing. Can't they send something home? When they know someone is struggling, can't they do something? I called a meeting a few times. I called once but nobody could get together and nothing ever happened. I asked for one toward the end of the semester. (P4-1)

All teachers and Section 504 coordinators spoke about the lack of time available to complete all of the school related tasks required of them. Mrs. Kane suggested that one person needs to be allotted time to follow through with the responsibilities for the Section 504 process at each grade level. She stated,

Have one person that is in charge of all of them. It would kind of take the headache off all the extra paperwork of the teachers. If you had one person who was in charge of all the sixth grade 504s, seventh grade 504s, and eighth grade 504s, they could be in charge of making sure that they are rewritten... talk to the parents... make the contacts... follow up on the kids. [This person] could meet with the kids to see how things are going. It would be nice if there could be just one person to check on those kids because they are the ones that fall through the cracks. They'd have to have the time and they would need be trained in what to do. (T2-2)

*Theme Two: Communication Between Parents
and Teachers Is Often Tenuous*

The data revealed that parents were discouraged about the meetings that were held regarding their child's performance. One parent stated,

The meeting itself is kind of overwhelming because you are with all of these people. It is not like in elementary school where everything stays pretty much the same in the classroom. I can't tell them what to do. I can only listen to them tell me. We have such a short period of time because they always have to get to the next class. (P4-1)

At the beginning of the school year, a parent wrote a letter to her child's teachers outlining the strategies that have worked in the past. She gave each teacher a copy of the letter at the meeting to discuss her son's individual accommodation plan.

In seventh grade, I wrote a letter to his teachers. I wrote...this is what you can expect from my child and these are the ways that I've learned are efficient in dealing with him. Like when you can't get his attention, tap his desk or touch him on the shoulder. It's unobtrusive and it works. Most of the teachers that were there just smiled, nodded, and set it aside. I had one teacher who sat there during this meeting and read the entire letter. You know, he aced that class...he flunked the other classes. I don't think they really understand the condition...I don't think they take the time to learn about it. (P1-1)

Parents consistently reported that ongoing communication throughout the school year with their child's teachers is inconsistent. They are unsure about assignment completion, upcoming projects, and grades received for work and tests. All of the parents in this study reported that, unless they take the initiative to contact the teachers, the only time teachers communicated with them is during parent teacher conferences or if there was a major behavioral incident involving their child. One parent stated, "I've never had a note; I've never been called this year. We wouldn't have been called except for that weird incident" (P2-2).

Another parent shared her thoughts.

There should be a deadline but nothing was said until a month afterward. We go to a conference and see a zero [on the grade sheet]. Why weren't we notified that he wasn't getting this in? That was when we had a really hard time. (P3-1)

Teachers also described their concerns about communicating with parents. Mrs. Kane talked about a situation when the parents decided to take their daughter off medication for attention deficit disorder and anxiety without telling the teacher.

They let us know a month and a half later. We could notice it and we knew that something was different. She was a little more energetic, a little more outgoing, and also a little more defiant. We brought it up at conferences. It was oh, well, we decided we would try it without medicine. It would have been nice to know. I hate it when they don't tell us. Sometimes they'll say we just wanted to see if you'd notice. (T2-1)

Both teachers and Section 504 coordinators expressed their concerns about parents who attend meetings with a long list of accommodations that the teachers are expected to make for the student.

Some parents will call with a very unreasonable request. Well, we don't have to honor it just because a parent wants it. I mean 504 is a team. It's the teachers and a parent. If the parent wants it and five teachers say no, it's not going to happen. (C1-1)

Some of them come in with a laundry list. This one parent had it all typed up. In the form of a 504, just like we were going to adopt her list and that is inappropriate. To me, that is aggressive. We took each point and talked it over and talked to the student. We took a piece of hers and tried to use her language and then tried to make something we could live with and that we were comfortable with...it was a very tense meeting. (T3-1)

Discussion of Category III: Collaboration

The transition to middle school can be a source of concern for all parents. During the adolescent years, teens are dramatically changing physically and emotionally. They begin to spend more time with their peers, they want less guidance from adults, they increase their interactions with opposite sex peers, and they place more importance on participation in large social groups (Cole & Cole, 1996). During this time, parents often find themselves in a quandary about finding the balance of providing support to their

child and encouraging independence (Felber, 1997; Tubman & Lerner, 1994). The concerns of parents who have students with a disability are exemplified during the transition process. At the middle school level, there is a wider variety of staff to work with, students are expected to change classes, contact time with teachers decreases dramatically, and parents may be unsure of whom to contact with concerns about their child (O'Shea et al., 2001).

Upham, Cheney, and Manning (1998) conducted a qualitative study that addressed the communication between teachers and parents of students with emotional disturbance who were served in an inclusive classroom. Six middle school teachers and six parents were interviewed about their perceptions of communication between parents and teachers. The data suggested that teachers and parents prefer face-to-face communication, scheduling of meeting times is problematic for both parents and teachers, and parents and teachers rarely discuss personal or emotional issues. The researchers found that teachers had preconceived biases about parents. Specifically, teachers believed parents had little time for their children and were not concerned about the behavior that was displayed in school. Parents shared that they wanted a more personalized relationship based on trust and honesty with the teachers.

Research has shown that collaboration and communication between parents and teachers at the middle school level are critical elements to the success for all students (Brost, 2000; Clark & Clark, 1996; George & Shewey, 1994; Jackson & Davis, 2000). This is even more crucial when students are known to have a disability. A collaborative orientation implies that no one operates in isolation. Teachers who espouse a collaborative philosophy are sensitive to the family's needs and strengths, teach based on

what they know about their students, and encourage learning in the general education classroom (O'Shea et al., 2001). The time needed for teachers and parents to collaborate is often seen as a barrier and needs to be supported by the school administration (Friend & Cook, 2003).

Bos, Nahmias, and Urban (1999) suggested that, for students with disabilities, the collaborative relationship between parents and teachers must be ongoing, reciprocal, respectful, and student centered. To sustain a collaborative relationship, the communication efforts between parents and teachers may entail the sharing of information about personal student information, medical history, assessment and behavioral interventions, determining appropriate accommodations and modifications, and student progress.

Central Phenomenon

The first step toward the formation of a visual paradigm (Appendix G) is to choose a central category that emerged from the data, was heavily saturated, and from where the theory will be derived (Creswell, 1998). The Section 504 process is the category identified as the central phenomenon. This category entails the perceptions and experiences of the parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators interviewed for this study.

When a student is diagnosed with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder and the Section 504 team suggested that the student would benefit from receiving accommodations from the school, the development and implementation of an individual accommodation plan should occur. "Section 504 is intended to level the playing field for students facing life challenges.

When it is introduced, implemented, and supported properly, a 504 plan can facilitate significant improvement in school success for all students” (Miller & Newbill, 1998, p. 13).

Causal Conditions

Causal conditions are the conditions that influence the central phenomenon identified as the Section 504 process. The first causal condition is that there must be an identified disability. The second causal condition is that there is a need for accommodations or modifications within the school setting. The following is one description of the process that parents experienced as they tried to get help for their child.

The identification process can be a lengthy and rocky road for parents. The following are excerpts about the Dorns’ journey toward a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder for their son, Brian.

The daycare lady made an issue of having a conference with us. She said that Brian was very smart, there was no doubt about that but he was immature. We should consider not putting him into kindergarten and having another year in preschool. (P2-1)

After talking with the kindergarten teacher, the parents chose to send Brian to kindergarten rather than retaining him in preschool.

...he was busy in her classroom [the kindergarten] but it was a very hands-on classroom. She was incredible. Most people thought that what they did at school was play but they learned constantly. He [Brian] still has experiences from kindergarten that he talks about. (P2-1)

The following year Brian attended first grade in the same school.

The teacher had a lot of experience but she expected kids to sit in circles and listen to directions, go back to their chairs, and do it on their own. I remember walking up to the first grade teacher on the Friday before Labor Day and asked how things were going. She looked at me and said he’s so [emphasis mine] busy. (P2-1)

Mrs. Dorn described an early experience during a parent teacher conference.

During the spring conference, the student teacher led the conference. The student teacher was very blunt. It was a horrible thing because my husband didn't show up until later. She just started describing his behaviors. Crawling on the floor, hiding, and inappropriate behaviors. (P2-1)

After consulting with Brian's medical doctor, Brian was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and was prescribed Ritalin to help with the behaviors. School seemed to go fine until fifth grade when Brian refused to eat lunch at school, demonstrated social difficulties with his peers, and he would become argumentative with his parents.

I don't think his medication ever got to a proper level. I think he was just tapped out on Ritalin and when he came down he became agitated. That year when I picked him up after work...it was hell because all he would do is chew at me. It was ugly and I'd get him home and feed him and he'd be a different kid. His rebounds from Ritalin were horrible. You know, it takes you awhile to figure it out. (P2-1)

The parents consulted with the doctor and asked if Concerta™ could be prescribed instead of the Ritalin. The doctor was reluctant to prescribe the medication but eventually agreed to it as long as Brian worked with the attention deficit disorder specialist who recommended that Brian see a child psychologist. Mrs. Dorn shared her thoughts about the meetings with a child psychologist.

We liked it. She was very matter-of-fact. She just made a lot of sense. She'd call Brian on a lot of different things. She'd just say, "Brian, that is not appropriate." He would try to take the upper hand and he was uncomfortable talking about his problems. (P2-1)

There was an incident in sixth grade that prompted the initial writing of a 504 plan.

Last year [in sixth grade] Brian had a social studies assignment that required him to study states and capitals. He didn't understand that he would be given a blank map with no key words and have to fill in the states and capitals. When he got a blank map he totally fell apart. He cried and cried and he couldn't get himself under control. That's the only incident there was and that was what prompted the 504. (P2-1)

Not until Brian had lost control in sixth grade was there any mention of writing a 504 plan. Even though he was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder at an early age, no formal accommodations other than taking medication were identified to assist him in the school environment. Sadly, there are many accommodations and modifications other than prescribing medication that could have been provided for Brian to alleviate some of the problems he was having in school.

Strategies

In axial coding, strategies are the specific actions or interactions that occur as a result of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The identified strategies that evolved from the central phenomenon included determination of student eligibility under Section 504, identification of appropriate accommodations and modifications, implementation of the individual accommodation plan, and review of the individual accommodation plan for effectiveness.

Context

The context is defined as the “specific conditions that influence the strategies” (Creswell, 2002, p. 444). Keeping in mind the influence the context has on the strategies, two specific conditions within the data were identified as philosophy and middle school.

The expectation of middle school students is to become more independent and self-sufficient as they proceed through the grades toward high school. The eighth grade teacher reflected on his philosophy of teaching students by stating, “The outcomes [for students] are centered more toward the student and the student’s ability. We are moving away from testing to projects so that students have a choice” (T1-1).

Middle schools are organized into interdisciplinary teams where the teachers share the same students, the same schedule, and the same part of the building. Teachers also share in the responsibility for planning the major academic subjects such as math, English, science, and social studies (George & Alexander, 2003).

Our middle school has two teams [per grade]. One is the Blue jays and one is the Red hawks. A hundred kids here and a hundred kids there. Each [team] has five core team teachers: English, math, science, social studies, and then life skills/health. They meet everyday during the same common period, the same five teachers so that if you have trouble with a kid, they can work it out. (C1-1)

There are two full [sixth grade] teams. The Raiders and the Captains. Now on those two full teams there are sub-teams also. Mr. M. and myself have a team of two...with about 45 kids between us. We are getting less departmentalized in terms of one class for the whole group. (T2-1)

The environment, organization, and student expectations within the context of the middle school should be taken into consideration when developing individual accommodation plans for students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder. Some of the contextual factors that should be considered for students with or without hyperactivity on individual accommodation plans include larger and unfamiliar staff, varied daily routines, movement from classroom to classroom, the use of lockers, and a variety of teaching styles and instructional methods (Bellis, 2002; O'Shea et al., 2001).

Intervening Conditions

Several intervening conditions that affect the strategies that evolve from the Section 504 process phenomenon were identified through analysis of the data. These intervening conditions included (a) lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities

of team members, (b) lack of understanding of the Section 504 process, and (c) lack of time for collaboration with parents regarding individual accommodation plans.

The first intervening condition addresses the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of team members in the Section 504 process. The parents and teachers frequently shared that they did not have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the Section 504 process.

The classroom teacher is really the case manager for them [referring to students who have an individual accommodation plan under Section 504]. The counselor for sixth grade would be our 504 coordinator. I think that their only role is to get all of the papers and divide them into the classrooms. I think that all that they do is to make sure they are divided up between the classrooms and they are all even so teachers don't get dumped on. (T2-1)

If parents have a concern about their child, they are unsure if they should contact the teachers or the Section 504 coordinator. The beginning of the school year is particularly difficult for parents because they are not sure whom to contact to discuss the needs of their child.

The second condition that affects the strategies is the understanding of the 504 procedures by parents and teachers. Even though teachers are expected to fulfill the case management duties for a student on an individual accommodation plan, they received little to no training on the process. In contrast, the Section 504 coordinators were the most knowledgeable about the legal implications of Section 504 and had received the greatest amount of training but typically do not attend Section 504 meetings unless there is a problem.

The parents shared that the process of reviewing the individual accommodation plan is different each year. In some cases, the teachers ask for parental input about their

child. In other cases, the team rewrites the plan or checks the continuation box on the form with little input from the parents. Some individual accommodation plans are reviewed in a formal meeting at the beginning of the school year, some plans are reviewed at parent teacher conferences in the fall, and some plans are mailed to parents to sign and return to the school. One parent shared how she attempted to make contact with the staff at the beginning of the school year.

In the fall, on the open house day, I said my son has a 504 and I contacted the new assistant principal who was in charge of him. I said my son has a 504 and ADHD and I'd appreciate a call if there are any issues and she said, likewise, I would like you to call us if you have any issues and that we are looking at those 504s right away. So, on February 20, I got a copy of a revised 504 plan in the mail. Nobody has ever contacted me about it other than at conferences. I think if the team got together and really had a focus on a certain child and the accommodations, they could do an awesome job but they'd have to be committed to it. (P2-1)

The third intervening condition that affects the strategies is the lack of time for collaboration regarding students on individual accommodation plans. This collaboration can be between parents and teachers as well as between teams of teachers. One parent shared that the meeting to discuss her son's individual accommodation plan lasted about 20 minutes. She shared her concern by saying, "You really don't get any time to discuss things with the teachers" (P1-2).

One teacher discussed the lack of time to meet with the allied teachers about students who are on individual accommodation plans. She shared,

They [referring to the allied teachers] need to know [about the 504 plan for a specific student] and sometimes they don't. We have a big binder that has all the IEP, 504 information that is available for them to read and check out and to look at...but sometimes you don't know for sure if they have gone through it and looked at it. They probably wouldn't know about the lighter cases. If it is a heavy case [referring to a medical condition] we would tell them. (T2-1)

Consequences

The first consequence that evolved from the strategies is parents of children on individual accommodation plans often feel “out of the loop,” resulting in a feeling of isolation. Parents have a vast amount of knowledge about their child. They also have an understanding of the accommodations and modifications that have and have not worked in the past. Parents want to provide that information early in the school year so that teachers will have a better understanding of the strengths and needs of their child in the classroom setting.

The second consequence is that individual accommodation plans for students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder are developed based on the diagnosis of the student rather than on the specific learning needs. Parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators report that the accommodations and modifications made for students with these diagnoses are often very basic. Examples of accommodations or modification may include takes medication, preferential seating, placed in a classroom with a sound system, has tests read, or provide modified assignments. This “cookbook” approach in the development of individual accommodation plans for students does not provide the opportunity to really understand the learning needs of the student. The emphasis is placed on completing the form rather than problem solving and figuring out what will truly help the student succeed.

Propositions

Three propositions drawn from the data are offered:

1. The lack of understanding of the development and implementation of the Section 504 individual accommodation plan is a cause of frustration for parents as well as for teachers.
2. Parents of children with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder do not feel valued as a team member in the development and implementation of their child's individual accommodation plan.
3. Lack of time within a teacher's schedule is a major barrier to collaboration and communication with parents.

Summary

In Chapter IV, the three categories and subsequent themes that emerged from the study were identified and described. Data supporting the themes and discussion of the literature relevant to the themes were provided.

Category I referred to the participants' understanding of the Section 504 process, the understanding of accommodations and modifications made for students with a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder, and the amount of training received about the Section 504 process. The themes that emerged within Category I were supported by the literature on the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the Section 504 process, knowing the appropriate accommodations to make for students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder, and training for school staff on the Section 504 process.

The themes within Category II were reinforced by the literature on the development, implementation, and periodic review of individual accommodation plans for students who were found eligible under Section 504. Transition from elementary school to middle school and from one grade to another was also discussed with reference to the literature.

The literature supported the themes of collaborative efforts at the middle school level and communication between parents and teachers under Category III. The collaborative relationship between parents and teachers must be ongoing, reciprocal, respectful, and student centered. Parents should be viewed as experts regarding their child. To sustain a collaborative relationship, the communication efforts between parents and teachers may entail the sharing of information about personal student information, medical history, assessment and behavioral interventions, determining appropriate accommodations and modifications, and student progress.

After the categories, themes, and discussion with reference to the literature were presented, I followed with a reconfiguration of the data in an axial coding paradigm. The central phenomenon was identified as well as the context in which it is embedded. In addition, the strategies, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences of the development and implementation of the Section 504 process were discussed. Three propositions were also presented that emerged through extensive analysis of the data.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions, experiences, and actions/interactions of teachers, parents, and Section 504 coordinators regarding the development and implementation of the Section 504 process for children in middle schools who have attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), or central auditory processing disorder (CAPD). This qualitative study utilized methodologies associated with a grounded theory approach to select data sources, design interview protocols, and collect and analyze data. The following three research questions served to guide the investigation:

1. What is the understanding of the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans for students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools by parents, teachers, and 504 coordinators?
2. What are the contextual and intervening conditions that influence the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans for middle school students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools?

3. What consequences or outcomes are derived from the contextual and intervening conditions that affect the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans for middle school students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools?

The participants selected for this study included four parents, three middle school teachers, and three Section 504 coordinators at the middle school level. Four parents of children with a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder were interviewed. Three of the four parents had a child who was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and one parent had a child who was diagnosed with central auditory processing disorder. All four students were attending middle school and had a current individual accommodation plan. Three middle school teachers, each with over 15 years of teaching experience, and three Section 504 coordinators were interviewed. The interviews focused on each individual's background information; knowledge of Section 504; the Section 504 process; perceptions; and experience with the development, implementation, and review of individual accommodation plans for students with disabilities.

In Chapter III, vignettes of participants were provided describing their personal experiences and perceptions of the Section 504 process. In Chapter IV, the experiences and perceptions from the interview data were combined and analyzed for commonalities, resulting in the emergence of three categories (knowledge, the Section 504 process, and collaboration) and seven themes that developed within the categories. After reconfiguring the categories and themes, an axial coding paradigm portraying the interrelationship of

the causal conditions, strategies, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences was developed (Appendix G). In the following pages, I will present and discuss the findings with regard to each of the research questions and compare and contrast the findings of this study to the literature previously cited.

Question 1: What is the understanding of the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans for students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools by parents, teachers, and 504 coordinators?

Students with disabilities who do not qualify for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 may receive services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If a student is found eligible under Section 504, a team approach is used to develop an individual accommodation plan that outlines accommodations or modifications made by general education teachers so that the student can have an equal opportunity to succeed in school (Utah Office of Education, 1992). “Section 504 is intended to level the playing field for students facing life challenges. When it is introduced, implemented, and supported properly, a 504 plan can facilitate significant improvement in school success for all students” (Miller & Newbill, 1998, p. 13).

An examination of the findings of this study indicated that parents were able to identify problems their children encountered regarding school related issues that had arisen during previous years. These problems often dealt with completing homework, filling out the planner, getting assignments in on time, and organizing long-term assignments. The literature supports that parents of children with disabilities have a

unique understanding of the needs of their children (O'Shea et al., 2001; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). According to Fowler (1992), parents of children who have attention deficit disorder take a primary role for explaining their child's disability to school administrators and teachers. Additionally, parents often have an understanding of the accommodations and modifications needed to assist their children in the school environment and will frequently seek the expertise of teachers for ways to implement the accommodations in the classroom setting (Wiese, 1992).

The results of a literature review of 21 studies revealed that general education teachers believed that making accommodations and instructional adaptations for students with disabilities was important, but they also had concerns about how to actually implement individual accommodation plans for students in their classrooms (Scott et al., 1998). The high regard for parents' knowledge by teachers and Section 504 coordinators in this study supported the findings of Scott et al. (1998). The teachers and Section 504 coordinators in this study viewed parents as being knowledgeable about their child and hoped that parents would share pertinent information with them. Teachers were generally positive in their views about making accommodations for students with disabilities but were concerned about the time it took to develop and implement some of the accommodations listed on a student's individual accommodation plan.

Question 2: What are the contextual and intervening conditions that influence the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans for middle school students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools?

George and Alexander (2003) suggested that the philosophy of middle school is grounded in accomplishing three essential goals for students. These goals include academic learning, personal development, and group citizenship. The emphasis on academic learning and personal development was supported by the findings in this study. The data from the teacher and Section 504 coordinator interviews suggested that they wanted academic success for all students, including those who were on individual accommodation plans. In addition, they wanted students to develop positive feelings about themselves and acquire the skills necessary to be successful.

An examination of the findings from this study suggested that the transition from elementary school to middle school can be a source of confusion and frustration for parents of children who are on individual accommodation plans. There are a number of contextual factors that are related to the challenges that arise for students with attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, or central auditory processing disorder. One contextual factor (related to middle school) is that parents and their children leave the comfort of knowing a smaller number of familiar staff and teachers in the elementary school and move to a much larger staff in the middle school. This transition results in a lack of knowing whom to contact about their concerns. Other contextual factors relate to the middle school environment. For example, students in middle school are required to move from classroom to classroom, resulting in a more varied daily routine. They are required to keep their books and materials organized in lockers and adapt to a variety of teaching styles and instructional methods. Every time students are required to change classrooms, they need to adjust to a new teacher, a new

seating arrangement, a different classroom routine, different acoustics, and a new group of peers (Bellis, 2002; O'Shea et al., 2001).

Three intervening conditions that affect the strategies that evolve from the Section 504 process phenomenon were identified in this study. These intervening conditions included (a) lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of team members, (b) lack of understanding of the Section 504 process, and (c) lack of time for collaboration with parents regarding individual accommodation plans.

The findings reported in this study suggested that parents and teachers do not have an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the Section 504 process. The literature is somewhat scant regarding the clarification of the responsibilities and roles of parents and teachers in the Section 504 process as compared to the roles and responsibilities of Section 504 coordinators. Richards (1994) outlined the responsibilities of the Section 504 coordinator by suggesting that they are responsible to develop and maintain a Section 504 program, distribute the necessary documentation and information to all campuses, and oversee the progress of all Section 504 committees. The Section 504 coordinator is also responsible for handling parent complaints, coordinating responses to Office of Civil Rights investigations, and making necessary arrangements for Section 504 due process hearings. The Section 504 coordinator attends trainings on Section 504 and provides in-services and workshops to other staff members within the district.

The need for pre-service and in-service training for teachers on the development, implementation, and review of Section 504 individual accommodation plans was evident in this study. The teachers were expected to execute the case management duties for a

student on an individual accommodation plan; however, they received little to no training on the process. In contrast, the Section 504 coordinators were the most knowledgeable about the legal implications of Section 504 and had received the greatest amount of training, but they typically do not attend Section 504 meetings unless there is a problem. The need for teacher training opportunities on the Section 504 process supported the findings of Blazer (1999) and Miller and Newbill (1998). Reid et al. (1994) concurred that to meet Section 504 mandates, general education teachers need access to ongoing training opportunities on the Section 504 process and the development of appropriate accommodation for students who have attention deficit disorder.

The issue of lack of time for collaboration between teachers and parents was revealed in this study and was also supported by the literature. Research has shown that collaboration and communication between parents and teachers at the middle school level are critical elements to the success for all students (Brost, 2000; Clark & Clark, 1996; George & Shewey, 1994; Jackson & Davis, 2000). This collaboration and communication is even more crucial when students are known to have a disability. Teachers who espouse a collaborative philosophy are sensitive to the family's needs and strengths, teach based on what they know about their students, and encourage learning in the general education classroom (O'Shea et al., 2001). The time needed for teachers and parents to collaborate is often seen as a barrier and needs to be supported by the school administration (Friend & Cook, 2003).

Bos et al. (1999) suggested that, for students with disabilities, the collaborative relationship between parents and teachers must be ongoing, reciprocal, respectful, and student centered. To sustain a collaborative relationship, the communication efforts

between parents and teachers may entail the sharing of information about personal student information, medical history, assessment and behavioral interventions, determining appropriate accommodations and modifications, and student progress.

Question 3: What consequences or outcomes are derived from the contextual and intervening conditions that affect the development, implementation, and support of Section 504 individual accommodation plans for middle school students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and/or central auditory processing disorder in middle schools?

The specific actions or strategies that resulted from the central phenomenon were identified as (a) determination of student eligibility under Section 504, (b) identification of appropriate accommodations and modifications, (c) implementation of the individual accommodation plan, and (d) review of the individual accommodation plan for effectiveness. The following paragraphs describe the consequences or outcomes that were derived from the strategies.

The first consequence is that parents of children on individual accommodation plans often feel “out of the loop,” resulting in a feeling of isolation. Parents have a vast amount of knowledge about their child. They also have an understanding of the accommodations and modifications that have and have not worked in the past. Parents want to take a proactive approach by communicating the strengths and needs of their child to the teachers so that accommodations and modification are being made at the beginning of the school year. Research has consistently shown that parents are considered to be “experts” about their children and want to do what is best for them (Friend & Cook, 2003; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001).

The second consequence is that individual accommodation plans for students with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder are developed based on the diagnosis of the student rather than on the specific learning needs. Parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators reported that the accommodations and modifications made for students with these diagnoses are often very basic. Examples of accommodations or modifications included takes medication, has preferential seating, is placed in a classroom with a sound system, has tests read, or is provided modified assignments. This “cookbook” approach in the development of individual accommodation plans for students does not provide the opportunity to really understand the learning needs of the student. The emphasis is placed on completing the form rather than problem solving and figuring out what will truly help the student succeed. Conderman and Katsiyannis (1995) and Stainback, Stainback, and Forest (1989) caution those who are involved in the development of individual accommodation plans to determine appropriate accommodations and services based on the student’s educational needs and not on the student’s label.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, three broad-based conclusions are offered. Each of these is described in the following paragraphs.

Parents and teachers lack a clear understanding of the Section 504 process and sometimes feel frustrated during the development, implementation, or review of a student’s individual accommodation plan. This conclusion is based upon the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of

those involved in the 504 process and the in-service training available to teachers on Section 504.

Parents of children with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity or central auditory processing disorder do not feel valued as a team member in the development and implementation of their child's individual accommodation plan. This conclusion is based on the experiences and perceptions parents had regarding communication with the teachers and the Section 504 coordinators. The parents reported feeling that, when they offered oral or written information, they felt that their knowledge was dismissed or not taken seriously by some teachers. Parents consistently reported that ongoing communication throughout the school year with their child's teachers was inconsistent. They were unsure about assignment completion, upcoming projects, and the grades their child received for work and tests. All of the parents reported that unless they took the initiative to contact the teachers, the only time teachers communicated with them was during parent teacher conferences or if there was a major behavioral incident involving their child. One parent was not aware that her child was placed on an individual accommodation plan and some parents were asked to review and sign the accommodation plan at parent teacher conferences. One possible explanation for the varied experiences of parents is that each middle school and the individual teams within the schools implement the steps in the Section 504 process differently.

The issue of lack of time within a teacher's schedule was a major barrier to collaboration and communication with parents. This conclusion is based on the perceptions of the teachers and Section 504 coordinators. All of the teachers and Section 504 coordinators in this study shared that teachers have a limited amount of time in their

schedule that is not already devoted to teaching students. In addition to developing lesson plans for teaching, teachers are encouraged to be active in building level and district level teams and complete other duties as assigned, leaving very little time for collaboration and communication with parents.

In the next section, I provide the reader with recommendations based upon the findings of this study. The first set of recommendations is made for school district personnel. The second set of recommendations is made to those interested in conducting further research that relates to the Section 504 process.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Parents and Educators

1. School district administration needs to better define system-wide policies and procedures regarding the steps in the Section 504 process, the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process, and procedures to transition students from one grade to another. Parents need to be updated on the Section 504 policies and procedures on a yearly basis.
2. It would be helpful to designate one school staff member for parents to contact with their concerns about issues related to the individual accommodation plan for their child. This person could assume the role of liaison between home and school, facilitate ongoing communication, and act as an advocate for the student. At the beginning of the school year, parents should also be informed, in writing, of whom to contact regarding their child's individual accommodation plan.

3. As teachers in the school district assume the case management responsibilities for students on individual accommodation plans, they need to be afforded training opportunities to learn about the development, implementation, and periodic review of individual accommodation plans for students who qualify under Section 504. In addition, the training should include information on attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and central auditory processing disorder.
4. University teacher training programs must provide students with opportunities to learn how to design and implement Section 504 individual accommodation plans for students with disabilities.
5. Parents must take responsibility to learn about the Section 504 process and continue to advocate for their child while supporting the efforts of teachers. If district trainings are being held, parents should be invited to attend.
6. Many good teachers naturally accommodate for students to give them the opportunity to be successful in their classrooms. Unfortunately, these “natural” accommodations are rarely written into a student’s individual accommodation plan. It is recommended that teachers need to reflect on the strategies that have been effective for the student with attention deficit disorder or central auditory processing disorder and incorporate these strategies, accommodations, and modifications into the student’s individual accommodation plan so that the information can be shared with other teachers from year to year.

7. Teachers need to listen and hear what parents are telling them about the accommodations and modifications that have been successful for the child during the previous years. This is not to say that teachers are going to implement all previously tried accommodations and modifications. Rather, it is about valuing the experiences and opinions of parents and using that information to develop an individual accommodation plan that will provide the student with the opportunity to succeed in school. Each plan should be reviewed and rewritten to accommodate the students' maturation while taking into account different teaching styles, schedules, and classes. The team should avoid using a "cookbook" approach when determining the accommodations and modifications that should be written into the plan. It is important to understand that all children with attention deficit disorder do not necessarily need to be in close proximity to the teacher, nor will all students with central auditory processing disorder benefit from a sound enhancement system in the classroom. The plan needs to be individualized based on firsthand knowledge and observations from those who actually know the student.
8. A meeting with the parents, teachers, and student (if appropriate) to discuss the student's individual accommodation plan should be held within the first four weeks of the school year. A specified time, separate from parent teacher conferences, needs to be scheduled to encourage parents to share their concerns and valuable information with the teachers and the teachers can inform parents about expectations for students. Such collaborative sessions might be able to identify possible accommodations, modifications, major

projects, long-term assignments, homework issues, and how communication between home and school will be handled. Through dialogue, parents and teachers can come to a mutual understanding as they work together to develop an individual accommodation plan for the student. The fall parent teacher conference can then be used as a checkpoint to see if the accommodations and modifications are effective.

9. Another recommendation is that communication must be a continuous process throughout the school year. Ongoing collaboration between the parents of children with attention deficit disorder and central auditory processing disorder and teachers is crucial to the success of each student. These students are often at risk for academic failure because of poor self-concept, difficulty with social interactions with peers, and lack of motivation. The more isolated students feel from their school community, the less motivated they will be to succeed in that environment. To reduce the risk of school failure, parents and teachers need to make a concerted effort to develop a collaborative relationship with each other that will foster ongoing communication about the student's academic progress throughout the school year. The collaborative relationship needs to be built over time so that a sense of trust, working together to meet a common goal, and student success are achieved.
10. As students move through the middle school and onto high school, they should be encouraged to act as their own self-advocates as it applies to the accommodations needed to be successful in school.

Recommendations for Researchers

1. This study should be duplicated at the elementary and high school levels to determine if similar findings exist. It would be informative to investigate, in depth, the transition process from elementary school to middle school or middle school to high school for students on individual accommodation plans.
2. The perceptions of students with disabilities who have an individual accommodation plan should be explored. During the review of the literature, I did not find any reference that gave voice to the students who receive accommodations, modifications, or services through Section 504.
3. The perceptions of administrators about the development, implementation, and review of the Section 504 process warrant study.
4. Since time for collaboration was a major issue for teachers, examining time-management procedures implemented by school staff related to carrying out the Section 504 process would be another avenue to take.
5. The last recommendation for future research would be to investigate the pre-service training that is provided to teachers who are entering the field of education.

Limitations

I believe that three limitations existed during this study. First, I confined the study to a qualitative examination of the perceptions, experiences, and actions/interactions of only four parents, three middle school teachers, and three Section 504 coordinators. Secondly, attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and central auditory processing disorder were the only diagnoses included in this study. The third limitation

was that school administrators were not included in the research design; therefore, it was difficult to ascertain their perceptions about the development, implementation, and review of individual accommodation plans.

Reflections

As a parent who has one child with central auditory processing disorder and one child with learning disabilities, I have sat on the other side of the table numerous times. Listening to the parents tell their stories and share their concerns, fears, frustrations, and hope for their children was a cathartic experience for me. As I transcribed the tapes from the parent interviews, I could identify with their feelings, because I had felt their sadness, frustration, and pain. There were several times that I needed to take a break from the transcription process because the experiences shared by parents were so similar to my own. I found that many feelings that had been stuffed away had surfaced. On the positive side, I was amazed at the resiliency these parents had demonstrated time and time again. They should be congratulated on the fortitude they demonstrated to help their children succeed.

The teachers and Section 504 coordinators who I interviewed truly care about all students, love what they do, and want to do what is in the best interest of the student. They struggle with a never-ending "to do" list, have a limited amount of time in their busy schedules, and are being pulled in many directions. As resources become more and more limited and teachers are expected to do more, I was amazed at the professionalism and dedication exhibited by those who I interviewed.

One thing that I have learned during this process is that "We are all in this together." Collaboration and communication among all of those involved in the Section

504 process needs to be the cornerstone in the development and implementation of individual accommodation plans for students with disabilities. I believe that there is a need to continue to do research in this area and hope to pursue several avenues that have been previously identified.

APPENDICES

Appendix A Consent Agreement Form

My name is Kari Chiasson and I am a full-time faculty member at the University of North Dakota in the special education program. I am currently pursuing my doctoral degree in special education. I would like to invite you to participate in a study that I will be doing for my dissertation.

The purpose of the study is to gain insight of the perceptions and experiences of general education middle school teachers, 504 coordinators/designees, and parents of middle school children with disabilities who are on a 504 plan. With this information, I believe that we can better understand the concerns shared by each group and what teachers, 504 coordinators, and parents can do to enhance or improve the development and implementation of the 504 plans for students with disabilities.

People who choose to participate in the study will be interviewed two times (approximately one hour in length for each interview) with a possible follow-up interview for clarification purposes. Each interview will be conducted at a location of the participant's choosing. The expected time commitment for each participant will be three hours.

All names of those participating will be changed in the transcripts of interviews and observations, as well as in any reports written after the study. In addition, specific names of schools will not be used. A list of the participants, along with the names that were assigned to them, will be stored in a locked file at the researcher's home. The signed confidentiality agreements will be stored in a separate locked file. All of the tapes from interviews, printed transcripts of the tapes, word processing files stored on floppy disks, and handwritten notes from observations and interviews will be stored in a third locked storage box in the researcher's home.

All tapes, transcripts, printouts, and computer files stored on floppy disks will be stored as described above for three years. After the three years, information on the floppy disks and audiotapes will be erased and written materials (e.g., consent forms, transcribed interviews, and notes) will be shredded. The only people who will have access to the tapes, handwritten notes, and transcripts collected for the study will be the researcher and members of the researcher's doctoral committee. Confidentiality would only be broken under a direct court order.

Those participating in the study will benefit directly as they will be able to share their insights in the development and implementation of 504 plans. Suggestions that teachers, 504 coordinators/designees, and parents may have about ways to enhance the 504 process will be put in a memo that will be available to all participants and other interested parties that might request the information. Others who may benefit from the results of the study include students with disabilities, school administrators, and pre-service faculty.

Little risk is involved with participation in this study; however, some participants might be uncomfortable talking about their experiences with 504 plans. Please understand that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may at any time discontinue your involvement. No penalties or loss of benefits will result from refusal to participate in this study. There will be no costs to participants. In the unlikely event that a

participant learns the identity of others in the study and the researcher or other participants learn that he or she has shared that information with anyone, the participant will be asked to leave the study. This is to protect the confidentiality of all participants.

If you have questions about the research, please call Kari Chiasson at 701-777-3236 or Dr. Myrna Olson at 701-777-3188. Kari Chiasson can also be reached by mail at 502 Walnut Street, Grand Forks, ND 58201, and Dr. Olson can be reached by mail at the University of North Dakota, Doctoral Program, PO Box 7189, Grand Forks, ND 58202-7189. If you have any questions or concerns, please call the Office of Research and Program Development at 701-777-4279.

At the conclusion of the study, a copy of the report will be made available for all participants through an e-mail request. You may contact me at chiassonk@aol.com for a copy of the findings.

****By signing below, the participant agrees to the conditions set out in the consent agreement. In addition, the participant acknowledges that he or she received a copy of the consent form.**

(Participant)

(Date)

Appendix B
Release of Information Authorization

Student's Name:

Date of Birth:

I hereby authorize and request:

To release a copy of _____ Section 504 individual
(Student's Name)
accommodation plan to:

Kari S. Chiasson
502 Walnut Street
Grand Forks, ND 58201

Signature: _____
(Parent or Legal Guardian Signature)

Date: _____ Witness: _____

Appendix C Parent Questionnaire

Background

- Tell me about __ (child) __.
- Family structure
- Educational background of parents

Diagnosis

- Can you share with me how you found out that _____ had a disability?
- Who actually gave you the diagnosis?
- Do you recall how you felt?
- After you found out about the disability, what happened with the school?

Knowledge: 504 Plan

- Can you share with me your understanding of a Section 504 individual accommodation plan?
- Who is the Section 504 coordinator (e.g., counselor, principal, team leader)?
- When you first met to develop the individual accommodation plan, did you feel that you understood what was happening?
- Can you describe the accommodations on _____'s individual accommodation plan?
- Were you asked for input in writing the individual accommodation plan? If so, what input did you give?

Process: Development and Implementation

- What do you see as the Section 504 coordinator's role in developing and implementing the individual accommodation plan?
- What do you see as the teacher's role in developing and implementing the individual accommodation plan?
- What do you see as your role in developing and implementing the individual accommodation plan?
- What role does your child have in the Section 504 plan process?
- Do you feel that the plan worked for _____? Why or why not?
- Can you describe how your child's individual accommodation plan is reviewed at the middle school?
- Did you get together to review the plan after a year? Who was at the meeting?
- Were there changes made on the plan? What types of changes?
- What were the responses of the Section 504 coordinator and teachers to your suggestions? What led you to think so?

Perceptions

- What are things that seem to be going especially well for _____?
- Now that _____ is in middle school, are there any particular challenges that he/she faces?
- Does _____'s disability have an impact on how he/she does in school? If so, what type of impact?
- How do you think _____ views his/her disability?

- What is your relationship like with the Section 504 coordinator?
- How would you describe your relationships with _____'s teachers.
- How would you respond to the following statement: "A major purpose of 504 individual accommodation plans is for teachers to level the playing field for students with disabilities"?
- If a close friend came to you and said that the school wants to write up a Section 504 individual accommodation plan for their child, what would you suggest to him/her?
- As a parent, what would make the Section 504 plan process easier for you?

Appendix D Teacher Questionnaire

Background

- Would you share with me your teaching experience (e.g., how long have you been teaching, subject areas, grade levels)?
- Could you describe a typical day as a ___(subject)___ teacher in your school?
- Approximately how many students do you teach?
- In a given year, how many students in your classes have been on an IEP?
- In a given year, how many students in your classes have been on a Section 504 individual accommodation plan?

Knowledge: 504 Plan

- Who is involved in developing or modifying a student's individual accommodation plan?
- How does one make a referral?
- What types of disabilities would make a student eligible for a Section 504 individual accommodation plan?
- What are your thoughts about the pre-service training you received on the Section 504 process?
- What types of in-service training have you received on the Section 504 process?

Process: Development and Implementation

- Could you describe how an individual accommodation plan is developed or modified in your school?
- What is the role of the student in the development and implementation of his/her individual accommodation plan?
- What is the role of parents in the development and implementation of the individual accommodation plan?
- What is the role of the Section 504 coordinator in the development and implementation of the individual accommodation plan?
- What is the role of the teachers in the development and implementation of the individual accommodation plan?
- Who should be ultimately responsible for the development and implementation of the individual accommodation plan?
- When do you typically receive a copy of the plan?
- How does the team share information about children on individual accommodation plans?
- How do you know if the plan is working?

Perceptions

- On a scale of 1-10 (1 being very comfortable and 10 being not comfortable at all), what is your comfort level of teaching students with the following disabilities: ADD/ADHD, CAPD?
- How would you respond to the following statement "A major purpose of Section 504 plans is for teachers to level the playing field for students with disabilities"?
- Do you feel that having students on an IEP in your classroom affects your teaching?
- Do you feel that having students on individual accommodation plans in your classroom affects your teaching?
- Could you describe a recent event regarding a student on an individual accommodation 504 plan?

- Can you discuss any issues you have experienced regarding communication between you, the parents, and the Section 504 coordinator regarding individual accommodation plans?
- Have you experienced any differences between teaching students on IEPs and Section 504 individual accommodation plans?
- Are some accommodations easier to implement in the classroom than others?
- In your opinion, do you feel that Section 504 plans are effective? Why or why not?
- Are some individual accommodation plans easier to implement than others? If so, what types and why?
- Drawing on your past experiences, can you compare the parents of general education students with those of parents of students on individual accommodation plans (e.g., attitude, communication efforts, parent teacher conferences, volunteering efforts)?
- Have you noticed any differences in how parents of students on individual accommodation plans are treated?
- If you could change anything about the Section 504 process, what would it be?

Appendix E Section 504 Coordinator Questionnaire

Background

- Could you give me some background information? What is your degree in? How long have you worked in the school system? In what capacity?
- What is your current role in the school?
- Could you describe what your typical day is like?
- Could you tell me as much as possible about the details of your experience as a Section 504 coordinator?
- In a given year, how many Section 504 plans do you oversee?

Knowledge: Section 504 Plan

- How does one make a referral?
- What types of disabilities would make a student eligible for a Section 504 plan?
- Who is involved in developing or modifying a student's individual accommodation plan?
- When is a 504 plan typically reviewed?
- What are your thoughts about the pre-service training you received on the Section 504 process?
- What types of in-service training have you received on the Section 504 process?

Process: Development and Implementation

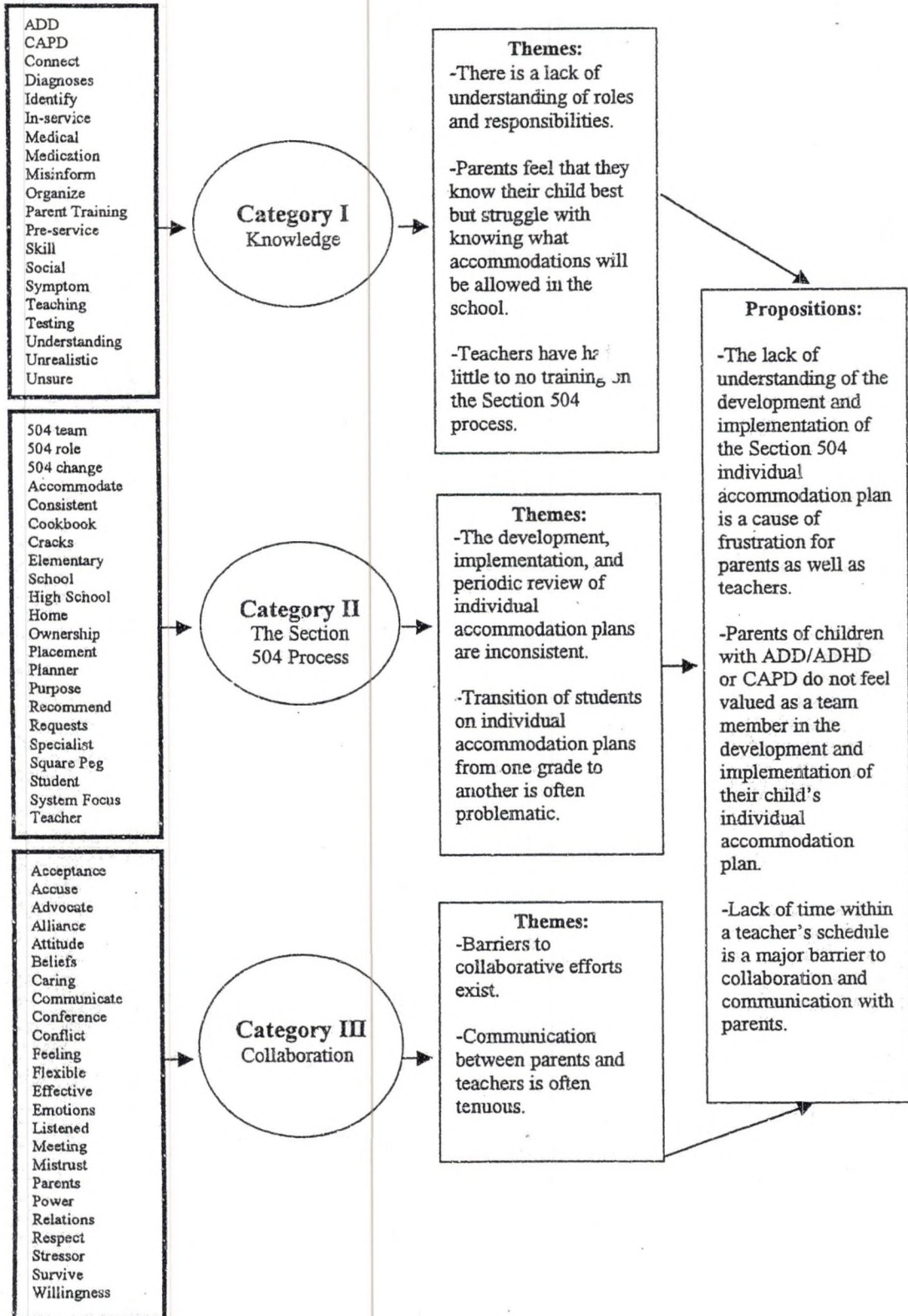
- Could you describe how an individual accommodation plan is developed or modified in your school?
- What is your responsibility in coordinating the Section 504 process?
- What is the role of the student in the development of the individual accommodation plan?
- What is the role of parents in the development of the individual accommodation plan?
- What is the role of the teachers in the development and implementation of the individual accommodation plan?
- Are there any challenges that you have encountered when you have been involved in the development of an individual accommodation plan?
- Who should be ultimately responsible for the development of the individual accommodation plan?
- How does the team share information about children on individual accommodation plans?
- How do you know if the plan is working?

Perceptions

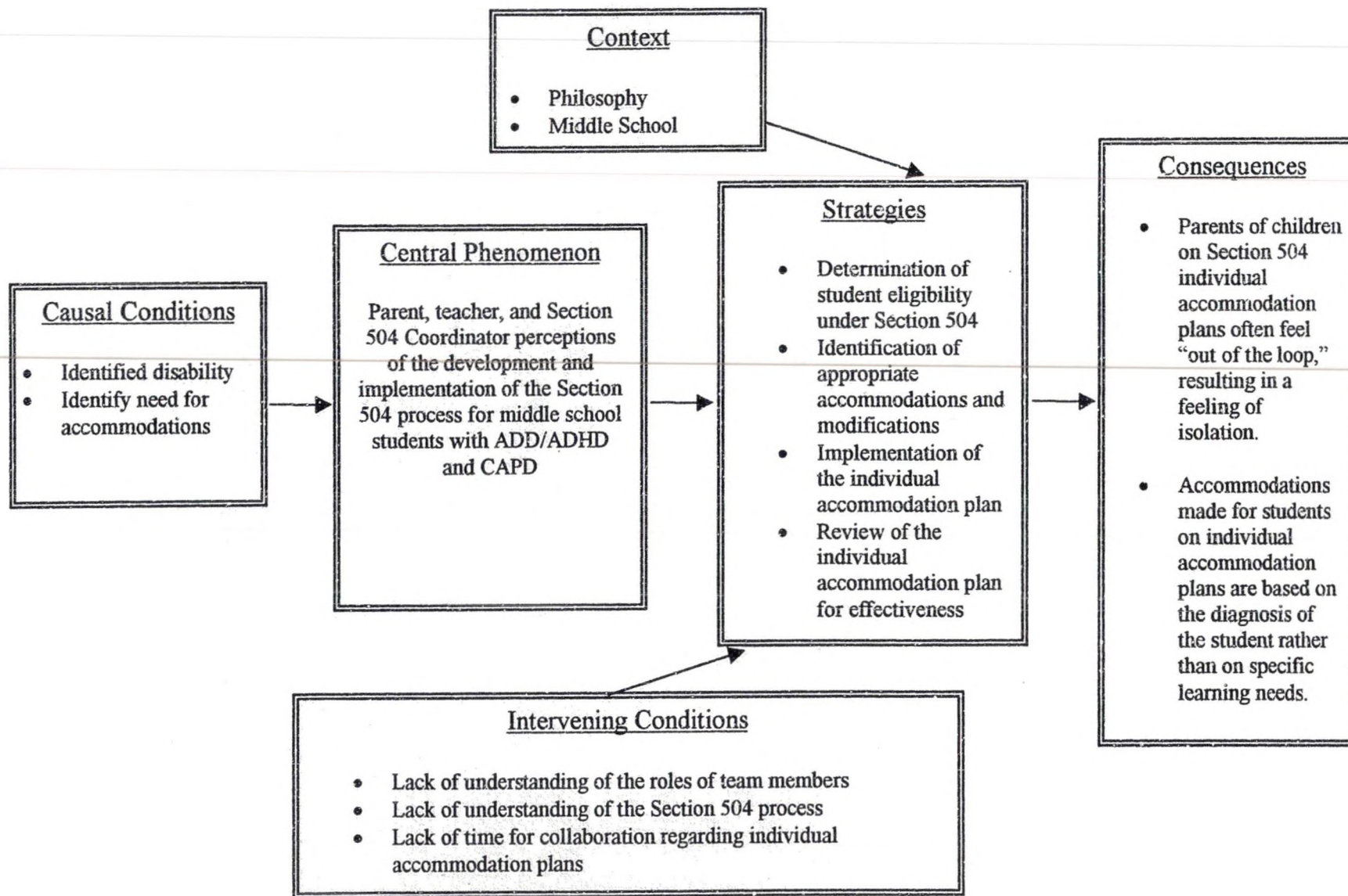
- On a scale of 1-10 (1 being very comfortable and 10 being not comfortable at all), what is your comfort level of developing accommodation plans for students with the following disabilities: ADD/ADHD, CAPD?
- How would you respond to the following statement: "A major purpose of Section 504 individual accommodation plans is for teachers to level the playing field for students with disabilities"?
- Could you describe a recent event regarding a student on an individual accommodation plan?
- Can you discuss any issues you have experienced regarding communication between you, the parents, and the teachers regarding individual accommodation plans?
- In your opinion, do you feel that Section 504 individual accommodation plans are effective? Why or why not?
- Are some individual accommodation plans easier to implement than others? If so, what types and why?

- Drawing on your past experiences, can you compare the parents of general education students with those of parents of students on individual accommodation plans (e.g., attitude, communication efforts, parent teacher conferences, volunteering efforts)?
- Have you noticed any differences in how parents of students on individual accommodation plans are treated?
- If you could change anything about the Section 504 process, what would it be?

Appendix F Concept Map



Appendix G
Axial Coding Paradigm



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