

Mount Saint Vincent University

Parental perceptions of the individual program planning process

by

Michael Derry MacKichan ©

B.Sc. St. Francis Xavier University

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
School Psychology

Faculty of Education

Halifax, Nova Scotia
Fall 2011

Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	2
ABSTRACT.....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	5
CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY.....	25
CHAPTER III: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	32
CHAPTER IV: SUMMARY.....	49
CHAPTER V: LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	52
CHAPTER VI: REFERENCES.....	57
CHAPTER VII: APPENDICES.....	61

Abstract

Students with special needs may access the curriculum through modified or individualistic plans. Parental involvement in developing the individualistic plans is pertinent to the success of both their children's education, as well as the plan itself. Research from the United States offers insight into how parents perceive the process of developing individualist plans. However, limited research has been conducted in Canada regarding how parents perceive Individual Program Plans in general. The current study examines parental perceptions concerning the Individual Program Planning Process in Nova Scotia. Eight parents were interviewed using a guided interview format that consisted of 16 questions based on prior research on the subject matter. Qualitative analysis of the eight interviews resulted in the classification of four major categories: *Educator-Parent Communication*, *Parental Perception of Educational Climate*, *Parent Knowledge*, and *Improvements to the IPP process*. Each category is reviewed here and supported with direct quotations from parent interviewees. Recommendations are then made for educators in the school system, university educators in the faculty of education programs, as well as recommendations for parents. Recommendations are made in the hopes of promoting further positive and productive IPP meetings for both inexperienced, as well as experienced, parents and educators.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank the parents involved in this study that dedicated their time to talk with me regarding their past experiences in the IPP process. Some of the questions may have been difficult, or may have triggered emotional experiences, yet the candor in their responses was, and is, truly appreciated.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Mary Jane Harkins, for her guidance and support throughout this project. I would also like to thank my committee member, Dr. Joseph Murphy for his feedback and attention to detail throughout this entire process.

Finally, I would like to thank Jennifer Lassiter from The Aurora School in Leesburg, VA, for inspiring this study. Without my experiences with Jennifer at The Aurora School this study would have never happened.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Students with exceptionalities are taught using the principles of special education. Special education laws were designed to ensure equal rights for disabled children (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). The most significant aspect of these laws is the individual program plan (IPP) (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). The IPP is a plan that ensures teachers are accountable for educating students who have trouble following the regular curriculum (Vaughn, 2003). The IPP's design uses yearlong curriculum goals, and breaks said goals down into smaller ones so that progress can be more easily tracked for students with exceptionalities (Vaughn, 2003). Many individuals are involved in forming an IPP, such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents (Department of education, 2006); as forming an IPP requires a great amount of effort from the people involved (Cooper, 1996). As a result, those involved in IPPs have formed opinions and perceptions concerning the program, particularly surrounding the creation process, due to the immense workload needed to build and maintain an IPP.

Past research has focused on attitudes toward the IPP process with input coming from teachers, students, and parents. The research conducted on teachers' attitudes towards IPPs was performed in Nova Scotia, while research on parental attitudes and perceptions was not conducted in Nova Scotia. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to assess the attitudes and perceptions of Nova Scotian parents regarding the IPP process. It is important to note that the term 'legal guardian' can also apply when referring to parents. To fully understand the IPP process, the context in which the IPP developed will be explained; in particular, the special education system in the United

States will be examined in order to understand how the Canadian special education system came to be as it is today.

Literature Review

Special Education in the United States

Special education is an approach to educating students with exceptionalities that focuses on individual strengths and needs of the student (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). The concepts associated with this educational approach emerged in the United States during the 1960s due in part to the civil rights movement (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). The starting point for special education as it is known today emerged from the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975; this act is also known as Public Law 94-142 (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008; Cooper, 1996). A tenant of this law is the emphasis on individualized instruction (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act) was enacted to ensure that all children with disabilities had the right to a free and appropriate education (American Academy of Pediatrics, 1999) that would take place in the least restrictive environment possible.

A revision to the law in 1986 saw the same services extended for infants (from birth to age three) and children ages three to six (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). In 1990, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was reauthorized under the new name Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, OSEP, 2000), and included services for children with traumatic brain injury and autism spectrum disorder (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). In 1997, the IDEA underwent changes that made teachers responsible for student progress (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). In 2002, for instance, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, PL 107-110) was implemented (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008).

This law was very influential for students with exceptionalities in that it held educators accountable for student success, it gave parents the option to change their child's school if they were not satisfied, it allowed access to special funding, and required scientifically validated methods to have every child reading by grade three (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008; Vaughn, Bos, Shay Schumm, 2007).

Special Education in Canada

Rudimentary forms of educating children with disabilities can be traced back as far as the mid 1700s in Canada. Such education, however, was a tutorial style reserved for the wealthy (Bunch, 1994). Education for disabled students shifted to residential schools in the early 1900s, but it was predominantly restricted to the upper class (Bunch, 1994). In either instance, these schools were mostly reserved for students who were deaf, blind, or had physical disabilities (Bunch, 1994). Due to the demand for similar services applicable to all classes a segregated educational system was created. This system competed for funds with the regular education system, and spawned specialized school personnel. Students who were previously excluded from formal education were now included in these segregated schools. Specialized segregated education was at its pinnacle in 1970. As many students with disabilities were entering the segregated schools, and few were exiting, many in the educational field began to express dissatisfaction with the segregation process (Bunch, 1994). This frustration caused educators and government to compromise, thus proposing the concept of Least Restrictive Environment (Bunch, 1994). From 1970 to 1985 more students with mild to moderate disabilities were moved to regular classrooms. Also of great consequence to special education was the enactment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the 1980s (Department of Education,

2001). Section 15, Equality of Rights, states that, “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability” (Department of Justice, Canada, 1982, 15 (1)). This section serves as one of the most influential aspects of the inclusion movement. In the 1990s the trend of inclusive education had gained considerable momentum (Edmunds, 2000). Inclusion is the culmination of special education and regular education with an emphasis on individual needs (Edmunds, 2000).

Special Education in Nova Scotia

Education in Canada is currently provincially mandated (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). Therefore, each province or territory has unique legislation regarding special education. Most provinces have adopted an inclusive special education philosophy (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008). In Nova Scotia, the first piece of legislation that mandated access to education for children with disabilities was the Education Act of 1967 (Department of Education, 2001). In 1973 the Education Act was amended, adding Regulation 7(c) “instruction for physically or mentally handicapped children” to the Act. This regulation stated that the education of children with disabilities was the responsibility of school boards (Department of Education, 2001). The Education Act was again amended in 1986 with Regulation 6(e) that made it obligatory for school boards to make special education programs and services available to students with special needs (Department of Education, 2001). In 1996 a new Education Act was issued (Department of Education, 2001). This act specified that teachers had a responsibility to develop and implement individual program plans for students with exceptionalities (Department of

Education, 2001). The first Special Education Policy Manual was also created in 1996 (Department of Education, 2001). It was the first document that explained how special education should be governed in Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia Department of Education is the government body that regulates education in Nova Scotia. According to current provincial legislation, schools in Nova Scotia are required to create programs for students with special needs in a regular educational setting with their peers (The Education Act, 2002). In 2008, an updated Special Education Policy was released. This document was released with the intention of assisting individual school boards in creating special education policies. In the Statement of Principles section of this policy manual students with special needs have a right to an appropriate education alongside their peers (Special Education Policy, 2008). If a student with special needs is having difficulty learning within the regular classroom setting an individualistic approach to his or her education may be needed (Special Education Policy, 2008). Therefore, the student may be placed on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or in an Individual Program Plan (IPP). In Nova Scotia, the IEP is called an Individual Program Plan (or IPP). Therefore, when referring to matters pertaining to Nova Scotia, the term IPP will be used from here on. On the other hand, when referring to research outside this province, the term IEP will be used.

Individual Education Plans

“The IEP is the legal document that outlines a student’s individualized educational goals, the services that a student with exceptionalities will receive, the methods and strategies that will be used to deliver these services to ensure that goals are met, and the placement in which all of these will be provided” (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2008, p. 36). According to the Nova Scotia Department of Education, the IPP is defined

as "... a statement of annual individualized outcomes and specific individualized outcomes based on the student's strengths and needs that is developed and implemented for every student for whom Nova Scotia's public school programs curriculum outcomes are not applicable and/or attainable" (Department of Education, 2006, p. 5).

In the Special Education policy it states that the individual school boards are responsible for creating a way to identify, assess, plan programs for, and evaluate students with special needs. Policy 2.2 identifies an eight-step process that school boards could follow. The first step in the process is to screen and identify students that may require an IPP. This identification process is based on student need. The policy suggests that parents are expected to be involved at the onset of this process.

The second step in the process is to explore a variety of behavioral and instructional strategies that could help the student succeed. At this stage it is important that records be kept on all methods that are attempted to help the student. Again the policy states that parental input at this stage is necessary. If step two was unsuccessful in meeting the student's needs, then step three calls for referring the student to the program planning team.

The referral process varies by school and school board policies. However, in all cases, the final decision on whether or not the referral is brought to the attention of the program planning team is at the principal's discretion. If the principal does decide that a referral should be made to the program planning team, then the next step (step four) is to have a program planning team meeting.

The program planning team is comprised of individuals who share in the "responsibility of [a] student's learning" (Special Education Policy, pp. 25) Among these

individuals are: the principle or vice principle, teachers who work with the student, and parents of the students. The policy states that these members form the core of the program planning team. The policy also says that, “Every attempt should be made to encourage parents to feel comfortable in presenting their views of the student’s strengths and challenges” (Special Education Policy, pp. 26). It is also in this step that the team must decide whether or not to continue with the development of an Individual Program Plan (IPP).

Step five is the development of the IPP. The Department of Education encourages those who implement the IPP to be involved in the development of the IPP. Step six is the actual implementation of the IPP. At this point teachers are responsible to track the student’s progress and report back to the parents. In step seven teachers and other professionals are required to continually monitor the IPP in order to assess student progress. The final step, step eight, is the review of the IPP. The planning team, which includes the parents, is required to meet and discuss student progress. The program planning team can make changes to the IPP if necessary.

The IPP should contain a summary from the team members of the student’s strengths and challenges. Assessing the student’s challenges allow team members to create annual outcomes that both the student as well as the team will strive to achieve using a combination of the student’s assessed strengths and curriculum adaptations (Special Education Policy, 2006). Annual outcomes are statements of estimated future achievement that are based on the student’s past performance. The team determines which skill areas are a priority, and then develops annual outcomes to target these areas with the aim of increasing said skill areas. To help attain the annual individualized goals

incremental steps called specific individualized outcomes are created (Special Education Policy, 2006). These incremental steps are organized according to a developmental progression, starting with easier outcomes and moving forward to more difficult outcomes. Reaching specific and annual outcomes may require additional strategies and resources. Therefore, it may be necessary to use educational strategies, materials/equipment, or human resources (school psychologists, teacher assistants, or speech-language pathologists). Although implementing the IPP is the responsibility of the entire team, specific responsibility areas are assigned to individuals with the proper professional competence and/or training. Consequently, there is a section on the IPP that outlines who is in charge of implementing specific responsibility areas.

Planning for a student's transition from formal education to community after graduation is also part of the program planning process (Special Education Policy, 2006); this process typically starts in junior high. Transition planning determines appropriate resources for the student's independent living, recreational pursuits, and employment strategy (Special Education Policy, 2006). To create an individualized transition plan, an analysis of the student's strengths and challenges is again conducted, this time also taking into account the student's aspirations (Special Education Policy, 2006).

Attitudes and Perceptions of IEPs

I. Attitudes of Educators

From the description of an IPP it is apparent that many individuals unite in order to lend their input in developing a plan for their students. Although the IPP or IEP process is mandatory for special education programs, and inclusive education in general, it is important to note that some individuals do not feel that IEPs are beneficial to students. It

is also important to note educators' attitude toward inclusive education.

Since the inception of the Special Education Policy Manual in 1996, special education in Nova Scotia has undergone some major changes (Edmunds, 2000). One in particular is the adaptation of the educational philosophy of inclusion. Prior to inclusive practices, students with special needs were educated in segregated settings or by pullout support programs (Edmunds, 2000). According to Edmunds (2000) the requirements from the 1996 Special Education Policy were implemented without much forewarning. Therefore, teachers had to cope with immediate changes in policy (Edmunds, 2000).

Edmunds (1998) examined four central issues to inclusive education through 183 classroom teachers from 14 schools throughout Nova Scotia. Specifically, Edmunds (1998) looked at: effects of inclusion on the regular classroom teacher, appropriateness of teacher workload, teacher self-confidence in inclusion, and adequacy of teacher preparedness for inclusion. Results indicated that teachers felt they were not adequately prepared to work with high needs students. Results also revealed that teachers were not confident in their ability to modify materials to suit students with special needs. Teachers perceived that the workload increased with inclusion. Similarly, teachers felt that activities associated with inclusion caused them to alter their typical teaching habits. Edmunds (1998) concludes that the aforementioned results imply a strong negative opinion of the concept of inclusion. Edmunds (1998) notes that examples of positive attitudes were evident in the sample as well. For instance, taken from the results, some teachers felt they could provide a positive learning environment, and that their efforts would have an overall positive effect on special needs students (Edmunds, 1998).

In an attempt to study the attitudes of inclusion, Edmunds (2000) examined teacher

perceptions and needs in one school in Nova Scotia. Specifically, Edmunds (2000) looked at: perceived needs for successful implementation of inclusion, perceptions of inclusion, and knowledge of inclusion. Concerning the area of teacher needs, results indicated that teachers desired more professional training when it came to implementing inclusive practices. Also, teachers stated smaller class sizes would allow for more individualized attention. In addition, teachers felt that they needed more planning time to fully prepare for an inclusive classroom. Parental involvement was ranked lowest in terms of teachers needs. In the area of teachers perceptions, results indicated that teachers did not feel prepared to work with special needs students, and that their workload should be reduced so they could be adequately prepared (Edmunds, 2000). Overall, teachers felt confident in their ability to include students with special needs in their classrooms.

French (1998) conducted a study for the Nova Scotia Teachers Union that assessed educators' perceptions of the IPP process. A questionnaire was developed that assessed educators' perceptions of the IPP process, as well as the implementation, development, evaluation, and efficacy of IPPs (French, 1998). Results indicated that teachers felt IPPs were necessary, but they needed more training and assistance before implementation could occur (French, 1998). Furthermore, only 9.3% of educators felt there was sufficient funding to implement an IPP (French, 1998). Approximately half of teachers felt that parents had unrealistic beliefs regarding the IPP process (French, 1998).

In summary, Nova Scotia educators generally feel that IPPs can be effective given proper resources. These resources, however, are by and large not granted to teachers practicing in an inclusive classroom. The difficulties surrounding IPPs or IEPs are not unique to Nova Scotia. In fact, research from the United Kingdom highlights similar

struggles.

Cooper (1996) warns that since teachers already have much paper work, the IEP process might be seen as just another form filling exercise. In the United Kingdom, Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCo) are teachers who are responsible for special education services within the school. The role of a SENCo is to advise teachers working with children that have special needs, ensure IEPs are in place, and to act as a liaison between parents and schools. Researchers examined SENCo's perceptions of the IEP process, and Tennant (2007) quotes one Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) who explains, "IEPs in secondary school don't work." Other research, too, echo's this sentiment (Wedell, 2001; Carnine & Granzin, 2001; Lingard, 2001).

Frankl (2005) states that since IEPs have become necessary in the UK many schools developed an intricate system to monitor, write, and review IEPs. Frankl (2005) believes that because of the complexity of such systems the IEP process has become unmanageable. The following is a summary of problems with the IEP process as highlighted by Frankl (2005). First, IEPs are to be reviewed three times per year in addition to the yearly review of annual goals. This creates an excessive amount of paper work for special education needs coordinators. Second, classroom teachers often feel it is not their responsibility to carry out the necessary tasks to complete annual IEP goals; instead teachers feel it is the duty of special education needs coordinators to do this teaching. Third, IEPs tend to be written in a format that is analogous to behaviorist principles. Thus, teaching of IEP goals tend to be narrow and linear. Fourth, learning is solely measured as whether the student met the IEP goals instead of the benefit of overall learning. Another area of concern regardin IEPs is that teachers still possess control of

what goals are selected for the student, which usually occurs with no input from the student or parents.

Therefore, a recurrent theme in the literature on IEPs is that the programs take up far too much of the teacher's time, because of the paper work requirement and lack of support for educators. Due to time constraints and lack of resources some professionals develop negative attitudes towards IEPs (Tike-Bafra & Kargin, 2009). Cooper (1996) also notes that there is often a discrepancy between what an IEP says and what teachers do, which is crucial considering that the attitudes of individuals carrying out the IEP determine their effectiveness. Cooper (1996) suggests that the effectiveness of an IEP depends largely on the context in which it is created. Similarly, Tennant (2007) suggests the success of an IEP primarily depends on the overall school culture. Furthermore, Tennant (2007) cautions that the negative views of IEPs could result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, causing the IEP to be of no benefit to the student. The author notes that schools are often forthcoming with information when they are deemed successful with IEPs, while other schools are unapproachable if they are viewed as unsuccessful (Tennant, 2007). The points articulated in Tike-Bafra and Kargin (2009), Cooper (1996), and Tennant (2007) are aligned with the views expressed in research from Nova Scotia: if educators hold a negative view of IEPs it could be detrimental to student success.

II. Student Perceptions of IEPs

In the US, there is legislation that requires students to be part of the IEP process when it is deemed appropriate. What typically occurs, however, appears to contradict this legislation. Martin, Marshall, and Sale (2004) analyzed the perceptions of 1,638 participants from 393 IEP meetings that spanned three consecutive years. Results

indicated that students knew significantly less than any other IEP participant concerning the reason for the meeting, knowing what do during the meeting, and knowing what was said during the meeting. They also found that students did not feel as though they could say what they were thinking during the meeting. Similarly, Martin et al. (2006) demonstrated that in a typical IEP conference Special Educators talked 51% of the time, while parents or guardians only spoke 15% of the time. General education teachers and school administration each talked 9%, and support personnel spoke 6% of the time. Students only spoke 3% of the time during IEP meetings.

Martin, Marshall, and Sale (2004) also examined the differences in IEP meetings when students were present. For the survey questions, “I knew the reason for the meeting,” and “I felt comfortable saying what I thought,” results indicated that parents reported significantly higher scores when students were present during the IEP. These results could mean that parents better understood the purpose of the meeting, and were more comfortable expressing their views with their child present. Similarly, general educators and related services personnel were also more comfortable expressing their thoughts when students were present in the IEP meetings. It was also observed that when students were present in the IEP meetings, school administrators talked more about the students’ needs and strengths.

In 2001 a revised Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs was introduced in the UK that emphasized parent and student participation in the formulation of IEPs (Goepel, 2009). The revised code encourages parents and their children to participate with IEP Teams in creating the child’s IEP. Goepel (2009) examined the IEP process with four students and their parents to discover whether children and parents were being

listened to during the IEP meetings. After interviewing the four students and their parents the author concluded that when there is a common understanding and mutual participation in the IEP process the document becomes “an effective IEP to which all parties could give allegiance” (Goepel, 2009, p.131). If such a partnership does not exist the child could be disengaged from learning because the allegiance is not formed. According to Goepel (2009), it appears that when students participate in the IEP process parents seem to develop a more thorough understanding of the IEP process.

In the majority of cases, however, students do not seem to understand the IEP process. As Goepel (2009) points out, when there is a mutual exchange of information between parent, child, and educator the IEP process is most beneficial to the child. Not including the child in the decision making process can risk alienating the child, therefore rendering the IEP ineffective.

III. Parental Perception of IEPs

In the US there is an expectation that parents be involved in the IEP process. In fact there is a minimum amount of parental involvement in the IEP process that is legally necessary. Even with a law stating that parents must be included in the IEP process, many parents feel left out of the decision-making process (Fish, 2008). Many parents feel that their opinions are not heard because educators rely too heavily on educational assessments (Fish, 2008). Since parents are not as knowledgeable about special education, educators tend to convince parents that they are the experts and should be making the decisions (Fish, 2008).

Fish (2008) assessed parental perceptions of the IEP process. Fifty-one parents of children who received special education support from a support service agency took part

in the study. The author created a questionnaire based on the literature of parental involvement in the IEP meetings. The results showed that 73% of parents disagreed with educators at one point during the IEP process, while only 27% felt that there were generally no disagreements with educators during the IEP process. In the second portion of the survey, the author asked parents about their level of knowledge and their perceptions concerning the educators' level of knowledge on the subject of the IEP process. Results indicated that 24% of parents strongly agree and 39% agree that they themselves understood the IEP process. Parental perception of the educators' knowledge level indicated that 16% of parents strongly agreed and 32% agreed that educators had sufficient knowledge of the IEP process.

To assess parental perception of the IEP conference, Garriott, Wandry, and Snyder (2000) sent a questionnaire to 84 parents of students with disabilities. Results showed that 89% of parents always attended the IEP conference for their child. Fifty-five percent of parents said they attended to provide input to educators, 25% said they attended to fulfill parental duties, and 19% said they attended to advocate for their child. Garriott, Wandry, and Snyder (2000) state that 42% of the open-ended responses seemed to indicate parents were taking a passive role in the IEP conference, meaning that parents attended meetings to be informed of progress and to find out what educators had planned for their children. Twenty-seven percent of parents stated that they attended the IEP conference with a partner or spouse, while 73% of parents indicated that spouses or partners did not attend the meetings. In this study mothers assumed the major responsibilities of the child during the meeting. Forty-five percent of parents indicated that they always felt treated as respected equals. These parents' comments adhere to the fact that educators asked for

parental input and a willingness to listen. Twenty-seven percent of parents felt they were usually treated as equals and as a respected team member. Generally, however, parents wanted be respected or to be recognized as an expert for their child's needs. Another 27% felt they were never treated as an equal contributing member of the IEP team. These parents generally felt useless or inadequate. Forty-six percent of parents said they always had enough input during IEP conferences. Twenty-four percent of parents said they usually had enough input during IEP conferences. Conversely, 27% of parents said they were never satisfied with their input into their child's IEP.

In Nova Scotia parents are also expected to participate in the IEP process. Pertinent to the Individual Program Plan (IPP) is the concept of inclusive education adopted by the Department of Education in Nova Scotia. The department states that the core of inclusive education is to "...facilitate the membership, participation, and learning of all students in school programs and activities" (Department of education, 2008). According to the Department of Education, the process of achieving inclusive education is complex and dependent upon many factors. One of these factors that contribute to student success is the involvement of parents from the onset of the IPP process. The vision of the Department of Education is to have all schools in Nova Scotia implementing an inclusive practice. In schools that practice inclusion, the Department of Education states that parents are contributing participants in the IPP development. In particular, the Special Education Policy (Department of education, 2008) states, "parents have a duty and a responsibility to support their children in achieving success. They are an integral part of their children's education and should be involved in the program planning from

the outset” (Special Education Policy, Policy 2.2). Therefore, it is expected that parents have a voice in regard to their child’s education.

Research conducted in Nova Scotia echoes the sentiments expressed in the studies reviewed above (Martin, Marshall, & Sale, 2004; Fish, 2008; Gopel, 2009; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000). For instance, in May of 2000 the Minister of Education formulated a review committee to review the Special Education Policy of 1996. Although the committee found several areas upon which there was improvement made in the implementation of the Special Education Policy, they also highlighted some areas where improvement could be made (Department of Education, 2001). In particular, the committee reported, “in terms of the program planning process, further efforts need to be made to ensure that meaningful parental involvement occurs” (Department of Education, 2001). In total the committee made 34 recommendations. One recommendation was directly targeted at parental involvement. This recommendation reads, “each school board should develop and implement a strategy consistent with the guide to enhance meaningful parental involvement in the program planning process” (Department of Education, 2001).

In a section on the program planning process, it is evident that parents and school personnel have different opinions on whether the program planning process has improved. Only 26% of parents of children with special needs who responded to the survey felt there was significant improvement in the program planning process. Conversely, 54% of school administrators and 51% of resource teachers felt the program planning process had significantly improved. Although the group facilitators did not formally assess parental involvement, many of the individuals involved in the focus groups noted that overall parental involvement had increased. The results of the survey

indicated a different result. According to the survey, only 24% of parents of a student with special needs stated that parental involvement had increased. Again, more school administrators (37%) felt that parental involvement had increased.

Since the publication of these findings in 2001, the Department of Education has published two documents aimed at explaining to parents what their role is in regards to the IPP process. The first document is titled, “The Program Planning Process: A Guide for Parents.” The Department of Education formulated this program-planning guide for parents after the Special Education Policy was reviewed in 2000. The focus of this guide is to educate parents on their rights and responsibilities in the program planning process. Another document titled, “Program Planning: A Team Approach” was also produced for parents. This two-page document is a quick reference guide to explain the individual program planning process to newcomers. It is one of six in a series of Supporting Student Success fact sheets.

Current Study

Fish (2006) states that, “often times, IEP meetings have failed to build an equal partnership among parents of students with autism and educators.” Therefore, Fish (2006) examined parental perceptions of IEP meetings, as well as how educators participating in the meeting perceived them. Participants in this study were members of The Association for Neurologically Impaired Children (AFNIC), a non-profit family support group advocating quality educational services for children with neurological disabilities.

Fish (2006) conducted semi-structured interviews with parents through AFNIC. He asked five questions that dealt with the quality of services, their treatment by the IEP team, changes they would recommend to the process, as well as how parents and schools

could improve IEP meetings. When asked to describe the quality of services that their child received as a result of the IEP meetings, parents reported negative experiences during the IEP meetings. The majority of parents indicated that the negative experiences stemmed from disagreements about the best approach for educating their children. Parents also perceived that IEP team members had mistreated them during IEP meetings in the past. A general theme among responses was that parents felt that educators saw parents as being unreasonable. In some cases parents were blamed for the difficulties that their children encountered due to their disabilities. The responses of parents concerning the changes they would like to see in their child's IEP meeting can be categorized into two fields: lack of understanding, and implementation of IEP objectives. Parents were under the impression that educators did not understand their child's disability. Parents stated that educators believed that the child was exhibiting certain behaviors purposefully, rather than because of their disability. Parents noted that objectives created during IEP meetings were not implemented. They felt that the IEP meeting was a formality that had to be done but, once the meeting was completed, objectives were not followed through.

Parents felt that they should be more involved in the process leading up to the meeting instead of just showing up to sign the document. In some cases, parents indicated that schools were adversarial and deceitful to themselves and other parents. Likewise, when asked about what parents could do to improve IEP meetings parents clearly stated more parental involvement was needed. Fish (2006) recommends that future research attempt to replicate this study with parents of children with autism, as well as different disability categories and family support groups.

There is evidence to suggest that educators have mixed opinions on the importance of IEPs. There are some educators who believe that the IEP is a bureaucratic exercise that causes massive amounts of paper work that eventually detracts precious time from educating children with special needs. Some educators feel that in the right context an IEP can be highly effective. There is much research on teachers' perceptions of the IEP process, but there is limited research on parental perceptions. There has not been any research conducted to assess parental perceptions of IPP meetings in Nova Scotia since the publication of the Special Education Review Policy, and the increased efforts by the Department of Education to disseminate information to parents about the IPP process. Therefore, the first goal of this study was to assess parental perceptions of the IPP process in Nova Scotia. A secondary goal of the current study was to extend the work from Fish (2006), and include different disability categories as well as family support groups in Nova Scotia.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to expand upon the results from Fish (2006) so that the conditions surrounding IPPs in Nova Scotia are understood from a parents' perspective. Currently there is limited data available that assesses the Nova Scotian IPP process from a parents' perspective. By understanding parental perceptions it may be possible to determine the strengths of the IPP process, as well as areas that need improvement. Since parents are a vital part of their children's education it is important to determine if the IPP process is parent friendly.

CHAPTER II

Methodology

Qualitative Research

Denzin, Lincoln, and Giardina (2006) state that quantitative research “ignores the contexts of experience” (p. 772). Qualitative research, however, provides a rich way of understanding social phenomena because it encompasses many different methods of inquiry (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004; Bogdan, & Bilken, 1998). Qualitative research allows for thorough explanations of social development (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). The goal of qualitative research is to understand the topic of interest from the perspective of the participant (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). Therefore, the topic of study is how participants experience events in their environment (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). Researchers using qualitative methods claim that such research produces an explanation of reality that is helpful in interpreting the human condition (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). Qualitative research data, therefore, is highly descriptive of the narratives that encompass the day-to-day lives of the research subjects (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998).

Data Collection and Analysis

As previously mentioned, qualitative research allows one to make sense of the undisciplined confusion of everyday experiences as they occur in natural settings (Richards & Morse, 2007). The intention of this study was to learn from parents how they experienced the IPP process. How they interpreted their experiences and what meaning they attached to the IPP process was also an integral part of this study. Qualitative research methods allowed the researcher to collect data on this topic without destroying the complexity and context surrounding their experiences (Richards & Morse, 2007).

Since the purpose of this research was to understand the IPP meeting from the parents' perspective the methodological approach of *grounded theory* was applied to this question. Grounded theory allows a researcher to construct theory grounded in data using detailed investigation and theoretical sensitivity (Richards & Morse, 2007). Data is systematically collected and then analyzed, resulting in information and theories that are close in association to one another (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theories that are formed using this method offer insight, increase comprehension, and provide a significant guide to action (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Interviewing

Interviews are one of the many approaches used in qualitative research. Interviews are used to produce rich data so readers can understand how subjects perceive the world (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). When research subjects express themselves fully, researchers gain in-depth knowledge about the subject's experiences and perspectives. Flick (2007) defines the interview as, "...a specific form of conversation where knowledge is produced through the interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee" (Preface, *Doing Interviews: The SAGE qualitative research kit*, 2007). This study employed a semi-structured interview format. The theme and open-ended questions were predetermined; however, room was left for follow-up questions by the interviewer and changes of topics by the interviewee.

Participants

This study targeted parents of children with special needs across different disability categories in the Halifax Regional Municipality, as well as a rural school board in Nova Scotia. Eight parents were recruited through the Learning Disability Association of Nova

Scotia, the Canadian Association for Community Living, and through a rural school board in Nova Scotia. Only parents with children who were currently on, and have been on, an IPP for more than 2 years were selected to participate in the study. It was assumed that these parents have more experience with IPPs.

Measures

Interview Schedule

In this study parents were interviewed individually using a guided interview format. The interviews were approximately 30 minutes in duration. The interview questions were based on previous research regarding parents and the IPP process (Martin, Marshall, & Sale, 2004; Fish, 2008; Gopel, 2009; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000). These questions encouraged parents to express their experiences and perceptions regarding the IPP process. The guiding questions that were used in this study can be found in Appendix A.

Demographic Questionnaire

Parents were also asked to complete a short questionnaire that measured demographics such as age-range, gender, parental involvement, and education. Parents were asked the age of their children and the number of years they had been participating in the IPP process. Such information allowed the researcher to put the interview information into context. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

Procedure

The study was first submitted to the Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board. After the study was approved the rural school board was contacted by phone by the researcher to briefly explain the purpose of the study and to determine if they were willing to participate. A summary of the study was provided to the rural school

board's ethics committee. Upon approval of the study the researcher sent out a written explanation of the study to several principals in the rural school board. The principals then arranged for the recruitment letters to be delivered in a sealed envelope to parents of children on IPPs. Parents that were interested in participating, and met the criteria of having a child currently in school on an IPP, then contacted the researcher. Next, the researcher contacted the disability organizations to determine if they were willing to participate in the study. A written explanation of the study was then provided to each disability support group. The organizations then disseminated a general recruitment letter via email to parents that belonged to their organization. The letter provided the parents with the researcher's contact information. Parents that were interested in participating, and met the criteria of having a child currently in school on an IPP, then contacted the researcher. The researcher, by phone or email, arranged a time and place to meet that was convenient for the parents from both the rural school board and the disability organizations. During a phone call the researcher explained the process of consent, and reviewed the parent's rights as participants. Before the interview took place the consent process, as well as the participant's rights were reviewed once more. The parents then signed consent forms to participate in the study. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis.

Recruiting parents to participate in this study proved to be difficult. Accessing participants through various disability organizations presented the researcher with unique challenges. Some organizations were reluctant to participate in the current study. Other organizations were very large and multilayered making it difficult to have the study approved. Some organizations had their own ethics committee that would have had to

review the study.

Recruiting parents through a rural school board in Nova Scotia also presented certain challenges. Once the ethics committee of the school board approved the current study it was up to the principals of the schools to decide whether they would agree to participate in the research. Several principals agreed to participate in this study by disseminating letters of recruitment to parents of children on IPPs.

Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis occurred in tandem (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). The analysis was conducted on the transcribed parent interviews. The transcribed interviews were coded in order to simplify and focus on particular characteristics seen in the data (Richard & Morse, 2007). Coding allows the researcher to move to the analysis stage by creating and developing generalizations from the data (Richard & Morse, 2007). The type of coding that was used for this study is called analytical coding. Analytical coding allows the researcher to categorize or develop patterns from the data (Richard & Morse, 2007) by grouping the participant's words into themes (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). In particular, each section of transcript was analyzed for words, patterns, phrases, and experiences. Keywords were chosen that represented a statement expressed in that section of transcript. The keywords were then organized into a grid. At the top of the grid, along the X-axis, each participant had his or her own column. The Y-axis was organized into 16 rows representing question one through 16. Each key for that question was written in the corresponding space. The grid allowed the researcher to see all of the keywords from all participants in one document. The most common keywords were used to find broad themes that represented the participants' perceptions.

Ethics

Key ethical considerations:

Transparency regarding the nature and purpose of the study. All parties involved in this research, including parents and disability support groups, were fully informed of all aspects of this study. There were no aspects of deception employed in the current study. The disability support groups received a letter explaining the study. They contacted parents and provided them with a letter of invitation to participate in the study. Prior to starting the meeting parents had a chance to ask the researcher questions about the study. Every attempt was made to make the interviewed parents feel as comfortable as possible.

Informed Consent. All participants were fully informed of the study and of their right to withdraw from the study at anytime they pleased. To ensure participants were aware of this right, a written and oral explanation was provided. Participants also signed a letter of consent stating they understood the right to withdraw from the study at anytime.

Privacy. The transcripts of each interview were coded to protect the research subjects' identities. The transcripts were stored in a locked filing cabinet, in a locked room. Participants were informed that the original data would be shredded once the research project was completed. Information was only used for educational and research purposes. Participants were informed that the research was conducted for use in a Master's thesis, conference presentations, and research publications (such as peer-reviewed journals). As a requirement of this Master's thesis the written document itself will be bound and stored at the Mount Saint Vincent Library. A summary of the findings will be provided to each agency involved in the study upon request.

Level of Risk or Harm. The level of risk or harm in this study was considered to be

minimal. There was the possibility that parents might have had some negative experiences regarding the IPP process, and talking about these negative events could have been distressing. In the event that the circumstances of the interview proved to be upsetting, the researcher was prepared to debrief with parents, and direct them to a counselor through their respective disability organizations or community resources (see Appendix G).

CHAPTER III

Results and Discussion

The results of this study are descriptive narratives of the day-to-day lives of parents involved in the Individual Program Planning process. The results, therefore, can be considered a summary of how parents experienced events in the context of the IPP process during the meetings at the school, and also from the perspective of raising a student on an IPP. The results section does not contain an identification key to track what each individual participant said. This precaution was taken since there were a small number of participants and, therefore, parents could have been identified by speech patterns or personal experiences. The results of the semi-structured interviews produced a great deal of data. Not all data, however, could be used in this study. Only the common themes in the data were used in this study. The themes in the data were organized into four broad categories: *Educator-Parent Communication*, *Parental Perception of Educational Climate*, *Parent Knowledge*, and *Improvements to the IPP process*. The categories are based entirely from the perspective of the participants. The following section begins with descriptions of the parents interviewed based on the results from the demographics questionnaire.

Demographic Questionnaire Results

Eight parents participated in the semi-structured interviews. All participants were females who ranged in age from 25 to 54. The majority of parents were in the age range of 40 to 44. Seven out of eight parents had post secondary education. The average number of children per household was two, with a range from one to four. The average number of children on an IPP per household was one, with a range from one to two. The

average age when the child was first placed on an IPP was about six years of age. The range was as young as five to as old as 11. The average length of time that a child was on an IPP was about seven years with a range from one year to 15 years. Considering these results this sample consisted of parents that ranged from being new to the IPP process, and of parents who have participated in the process for a considerable amount of time.

Research Categories Results and Discussion

Educator-Parent Communication

The participants identified several aspects that could be considered important for, or a detriment, to educator-parent communication. For example, parents talked about collaborative practices during IPP meetings, respect during IPP meetings, and perceptions of an ‘us vs. them’ climate.

Research on educators’ perceptions of the IEP process warns that because of the amount of paper work facing teachers the IEP can become just another form filling exercise (Cooper, 1996). Similarly, results from parent interviews echoes this sentiment:

It’s almost going through the motions.

They just fill in their blanks on the form, and then an IPP is presented to me to review...

And in the earlier years, people would actually talk a little bit more about goals and objectives of the IPP. And then in the later years, for instance at the high school [level], the program planning process became just people reading out the program plan out loud, and editing it. Which I found completely useless, and nobody actually ever really sat down and said to me, here’s a pamphlet on the program planning process.

Similarly, a Special Educational Needs Coordinator stated “IEPs in secondary school don’t work” (Tennant, 2007). Other research echo’s this sentiment (Wedell, 2001;

Carnine & Granzin, 2001; Lingard, 2001). Some parents expressed concern that there was a change in the IPP process from the elementary years to high-school years:

I feel that they used to take it seriously. I don't feel they take it very seriously anymore.

And in the earlier years, people would actually talk a little bit more about goals and objectives of the IPP. And then in the later years, for instance at the high school [level], the program planning process became just people reading out the program plan out loud, and editing it.

Another area of concern noted by Frankl (2005) is that teachers still have control over what goals are selected with no input from the parents. Similarly Fish (2008) stated that parents feel left out of the decision-making process. Fish (2008) states that educators tend to convince parents that they are the experts, and that they should be making the decisions because parents are not experts. Results from the current study indicate that some parents' perceptions resonate with views expressed in Frankl (2005) and Fish (2008):

Between the specialists and the teachers they usually come up with them [goals]. But they do ask my opinion. They do. Yeah and ask me if I have anything to add to it or anything I'd like to see changed.

They, well they do always ask is that okay with you or do you have anything to add to add to it. It's getting better, it wasn't so good when we started off.

I think they have to listen to the parent, and not make them, I know a lot of parents that have felt belittled.

So yes, you know what you want, you can say what you want and all that kind of stuff, but I walk out the door and I'm thinking, I think I just wasted an hour of my time because I don't think any of my input is actually going to make any difference.

But you're one person around the table with four, five or six other people, you know, and they try not to do an 'us versus them'.

Teams operate by consensus; so I was told when I had a different consensus that everybody else wants. My understanding is, I'm supposed to be there to give

input. That in theory, everybody pays lip service to the fact that I know my child better than anybody else – I don't believe they know that. I believe parents are very welcomed, valued and respected, as long as they do not cross the line between parent and professional.

They catch onto Clara, they know her, but they also have the sense that they also know how to do everything. They've got everything under control.

Not all parents, however, reported similar views regarding the issues raised in Frankl (2005) and Fish (2008). Some parents felt educators included them in the process and valued their opinions:

Because like I said, the parents know the child best, so they know what works and doesn't work for them in terms of learning. And you know that because you've raised them. You know how they think. So it's the little things that can personalize them [IPPs] that makes the sharing of information easier, and then the teacher is able to really kind of tap into how that person thinks.

Absolutely [it's a team process]. I think that's the only way it'll work. I think that's the only way it'll work because when three o'clock is done at school, it has to continue at home.

I think it's equal. I think it has to be equal, and I think parents, I think teachers would like it to be equal because not one person knows everything. And that's why most professions are team-related, because no one's perfect and you don't want to get sucked into tunnel vision. So you want to have, I mean, that's why they have boardrooms you know, people come together to generate ideas, and I think the teachers like that because, you know, you know your child from birth.

Well they know my son pretty good by now, the end of the first year. And they know what he can do, and what he should work on, and where he should be.

It's there, like it's up on the wall, sort of a screen on the computer that's really easy to change. Because they'll say, what do you think of that? And I'll say, oh, I think it's realistic or I think it isn't, and they'll change it right there. So they obviously are the ones trained to work with Sheri, I mean, I am her mom, but I do trust a lot of what they think she can achieve.

Garriott, Wandry, and Snyder (2000) found that 45% of parents indicated that they always feel treated as equal and respected. These parents' comments reflect that educators asked for parental input and were willing to listen. Results from the current

study indicated that parents' responses were mixed, with some feeling respected and others not feeling respected throughout the IPP process:

Yeah, I didn't feel disrespected that's for sure.

Yes. Yeah, yeah, absolutely [I felt respected].

Entering the process, I did [feel respected], yes. Later on in the process, sometimes not so much.

Yes [I felt respected]. Yeah, my input was pretty important.

Absolutely [I felt respected].

I think they tried to come across as being respectful, but I think as a parent you probably have an expectation that they're going to respect you, but I don't think you know what that respect really is.

I don't think they have a choice anymore, pretty much [to take what parents say seriously about their children]. I think that for some people, they don't think that it is, but I think as parents our backs are up anyway. We're really defensive about our children.

Fish (2006) conducted semi-structured interviews with parents through the AFNIC. Parents reported negative experiences during the IEP meetings when asked to describe the quality of services during the IEP meetings. Many of the parents indicated that the negative experiences stemmed from disagreements about the best method for educating their children. Only 27% of parents felt that there were generally no disagreements with educators during the IEP process (Fish, 2006). Results from the interviews conducted in the current study indicate a mixture of reasons for disagreement among educators and parents. Also, some parents indicated that there are no disagreements during the IPP process:

I found it very rocky first, but now it's been much better... [We disagreed] more so what he needed for education, yeah there is not enough TA support or not enough resource support.

And we have a difference of opinion as to how much he should be doing academic versus life skills.

Nothing in terms of what my child has gone through. I think [we agree on] just the plan that we're going to take, and we meet three times a year, and the plan of how it's going to lay out. And that I always go sometimes with tidbits of information of what works best at home, so if you want to try that in school. Because teachers are busy and they can't just focus on my child all the time.

Okay. And I just want to clarify, like typically the IPP meetings go smoothly, so we don't disagree there. It's when things crop up in the middle that I have to take care of. Like I can't wait for the IPP meetings. The only thing that we have been on the same page about, is socially where she needs things. We disagreed a lot last year on the academic portion, before Sheena got diagnosed with ADHD. I don't think there's anything [we disagree on].

Oh, it's wonderful, it's very you know, we just have coffee and talk. It's very amicable.

Really good, I think. Really good, yeah [getting along with educators].

Another general theme among responses from Fish (2006) was that parents felt that educators perceived them as being unreasonable. Although not common amongst parental responses, there were are some parents whose perceptions echoed this general theme from Fish (2006):

... but I really was a thorn in their side.

I mean, I'm pretty laid back now, but the first few years I was really in your face when it came to Andrea. Yeah, well I felt like I had to be, so I guess you develop a reputation as a parent that, you know, either you make this work or there's going to be – just, you're going to be challenged on it.

... because some of the parents will go in and they are just so emotional and sometimes they don't listen to them and I was probably like that at first because it was hard not to cry not to, but now I'm getting better at it.

And maybe part of that was just being an overly neurotic parent..

I said, I'm tired of trying to be this, like I feel like I'm a little dictator to the school, telling them what they have to do and what they shouldn't do. I said, I need somebody to back me up and say, this is what he should have.

... I felt, funny, but I felt in a way a little bit feared by the teacher.

Yeah, early on I had good advice from someone who said, when you go into a program planning meeting, if you're an angry parent they'll focus on an angry parent. And what you want them to focus on is your daughter. So I really tried hard to make sure that I checked my emotions at the door, but it's a difficult process to do when you're talking about something that's so emotional.

But when our son is not doing well, the mother bear in me comes out, and I get very defensive and I argue more. We were not in a good place, like grade 6, it was a tough year, and I was complete mother bear.

Also from Fish (2006), it was noted that parents felt that they should be more involved in the process of selecting yearlong goals and benchmarks instead of just showing up to sign the IEP. Results from the current study indicate that the perception of parental involvement varies from participant to participant. Meaning, some parents feel the IPP process is collaborative, while other parents do not feel involved in the IPP process:

I am [consulted] in form, but I don't feel I am [consulted] in substance.

They just fill in their blanks on the form, and then an IPP is presented to me to review, we have the meeting and I'm giving my input, then at Christmas time I get an IPP to look at to sign, and I don't know where half of it came from.

... I really engaged in it right from the very beginning, and so there was never an issue of that (showing up and the IPP was completed). I think it's really important to develop strong rapport with teachers. Because like I said, the parents know the child best, so they know what works and doesn't work for them in terms of learning. And you know that because you've raised them. You know how they think.

But I find there's a lot in the school system of what I call, talking the talk but not walking the walk. Like you know, like a lot of discussion of how it's an open door policy, and come to us anytime, and you know, we value your opinion, a lot of that stuff. But then when I bring my concerns or my opinions to them and I have really great ideas, they're not always keen to try it.

It usually is, that's usually how it's done (document is complete and all is needed is a signature). However, I can add to things, and they can reprint it if I do add to

things. Like, their suggestions are usually there, and they're usually right on, I really will give it to them.

Well my input is in there a lot of the time, I guess. It's just like they don't put anything in there without my input.

It's there, like it's up on the wall, sort of a screen on the computer that's really easy to change. Because they'll say, what do you think of that? And I'll say, oh, I think it's realistic or I think it isn't, and they'll change it right there. So they obviously are the ones trained to work with Anne, I mean, I am her mother, but I do trust a lot of what they think she can achieve.

Yes [the document was formulated without opinions and all I had to do was show up to sign it], and in the early years, certainly at the high school level, the IPP was just read out loud to me. I was sort of actually waiting, I was amazed by that whole process, a group of professionals sitting around staring at a document, editing it, asking me is this my telephone number, or is that still the medication your daughter is on? Is there anything else to add, and oh my god, we only have five minutes left because this teacher has to get back, and really nothing has changed, would you say? Is there anything you'd like to add to that, and can you sign that before you leave?

Parental Perception of Educational Climate

The participants identified several themes that could be considered related to school climate. Some of these issues include educational assistant support, policy issues, issues of school leadership, perceptions of teacher training, and scheduling of IPP meetings.

Frankl (2005) states that since IEPs have become necessary in the UK many schools have developed an intricate system to monitor, write, and review IEPs. It is believed that due to the complexity of such systems the IEP process has become difficult to manage. Results of the current study suggest that such difficulty in managing the IPP process is evident from parent responses. In particular, some parents felt the process has become too rushed:

The only thing is I find them very rushed.

Because it is, they're rushed through and like I said, I don't have any issues and so that's okay, but for a parent who might have a lot of issues, I can see the process being very frustrating like trying to get changes done.

As a matter of fact, near the end I felt that we were being slotted into times to shorten the process, so that it wouldn't take as much time from some people who didn't really even want to be there in the first place.

I mean, if you don't use all that time, then that's fine. But to crunch everything into 30 minutes, especially for a parent who has lots of questions, it's really hard. And especially when there are other parents outside waiting, you know what I mean, or people are looking at their watches and stuff.

Some parents indicated that the process can be rushed. When asked specifically about the scheduling of the IPP meetings, however, the majority of parents felt that their school was very accommodating when scheduling IPP meetings:

I work many different hours, so they do work around my schedule.

I haven't really had too many problems with [the scheduling of IPP meetings].

It's never been an issue. Until high school, they were generally after school and they always work with you to set up the time.

Oh, very convenient [the scheduling of IPP meetings].

Very [accommodating in scheduling the IPP meetings].

Oh, fine. They just call and say, what's good for you?

Cooper (1996) suggests that the effectiveness of an IEP largely depends on the context in which it was created. Tennant (2007) also suggests that the overall school culture determines the success of an IEP. Results from the current study seem to resonate with the ideas expressed in Cooper (1996) and Tennant (2007). Particularly, parents perceive differently which aspects contribute to the success of an IPP.

When you've got a special needs child, it depends on the leadership at the school.

It all depends on the teacher, it makes the difference. It's the most important thing if they don't understand disabilities, if they are unfamiliar with them, they don't know what to do with the child.

How much parental involvement occurs depends very much on the principal, because they are really the voice of the school. But I see where it changes even when you're in elementary school and there's a change in the principal or definitely the resource teacher too. Between the two of them, they set the tone.

It varies by the principal and how much control they are willing to take. And it varies very much by the resource teachers and their personalities, and their experiences and what they bring to the table.

The one thing I didn't like about the meetings was not all of the teachers were in on the IPPs. It was mostly home room, and as they get older, they get different teachers and not all the teachers are – and what I've realized is that, if those teachers are not involved in the IPP, those are the classes that he has the biggest challenges in.

... my good experiences were because of people in administration who had certain values, or had an interest in students with special needs, and they always seemed to go the extra mile.

In Fish (2008) the author asked parents about their perceptions of the educators' level of knowledge regarding the IEP process. Parent's perceptions of the educators' knowledge level indicate that 16% of parents strongly agreed and 32% agreed that educators had adequate knowledge of the IEP process. Results from the current study indicate that parental perceptions of educators' knowledge regarding the IPP process varied from parent to parent. Educators perceived levels of understanding also varied depending on whether the educator was an administrator, a specialized teacher, or a regular classroom teacher. There was also some variation depending on the number of years an educator has spent within the education field:

From what I've seen, yes [educators understand the IPP process]. They were on target with the things that I've seen so far, so yeah, I would say.

I find the younger teachers starting out [understand the IPP process], I've had much better luck with them.

Some administrators do [understand the IPP process], resource teachers for the most part do, classroom teachers, hit and miss.

I don't think they do. Honestly, I think that the people who put them in place as in the principals, the resource teachers, the reading recovery people, I think they know the IPP. I think when you get new graduates that are teaching students, that sometimes they're not aware of what the IPP actually is, other than to make their classroom environment a little more manageable for them.

I think most of them do.

Yes [educators understand the IPP process].

I think there's room for growth, for sure. But I definitely do think more education needs to go into special needs, and I don't know how much of the personal development days is involved with that, if any.

Some parents also felt that the leadership of the school determined how open the school would be to have parents come in to help or observe. It was also mentioned that the leadership of the school determined whether outside agencies could come in to support parents:

All I really wanted to do was see my daughter, how she was interacting, so I can bring that information to the specialist. But I wasn't allowed, so I kind of felt shot down, you know what I mean? Where is this open door policy stuff? So it wasn't there for that.

I felt that outside people that we brought in were seen in a way as an inconvenience, and that they added work to what the teachers and administration were already doing.

Fish (2006) reported that in some cases, parents indicated that schools were adversarial and deceitful. From the results of the current study only one parent indicated that they perceived the school was deceitful in some form:

I've actually seen in some cases where in the schools there's pressure put on educational program assistants not to talk to parents, learning centre teachers not to be totally honest with parents, with cutbacks, and I think this is all going to affect the program planning process.

Parental Knowledge

The participants identified several themes that could be considered related to the category of parental knowledge. Some of these issues include how prepared parents were for their first IPP meetings, how they felt during the first IPP meeting, their knowledge of the process, if they felt their child should be included in the IPP process, and the idea of seeking support for the IPP process.

United States legislation encourages that students be part of the IEP process when it is deemed appropriate. Based on results from Martin, Marshall, and Sale (2004) students are not typically included in the process. In Nova Scotia students are also encouraged to be a part of the program planning team “if appropriate” (Department of Education, 2006). In the current study parents were asked if they felt their child should be included in developing the IPP. Results indicated that the majority of parents did not feel their child should be included in the IPP process. Some parents felt that their child could be included once they were older, while some felt their child should not be included at all:

No, not yet. I think she’s still a little too young.

It’s a difficult question. Now that he’s in high school, we’re trying to get him to participate more in the meetings. But, that is pretty terrifying for him, so it is a good thing to try to work towards. There are certain meetings that you don’t want him present because you’re not able to speak freely in front of him. It also depends on the child and the extent of disability.

Because teachers assess their level, determine where they are, I think to a certain extent they are involved.

In our case, I don’t think so. Not at this age. Definitely later. She’s nine, but I guess mentally she’s not nine, but I really do have her best interest in mind, and I know what’s best for her. I think she would get too caught up in the process.

Eventually, when she’s old enough she should be included in the process.

I think it would be good to have them at one, or even at part of a meeting.

I think that when they are young they shouldn't be involved, as they get older they should be.

Fish (2008) asked parents about their level of knowledge regarding the IEP process.

Fish (2008) found that 24% of parents strongly agree and 39% agree that they understood the IEP process. Results from the current study are similar, however the majority of parents indicate they understand the IPP process:

Yeah, I understand [the IPP process], I just don't always agree with how it's implemented. Well I'd like to be back in middle school, where I had a lot more contact – I see resource teachers as my liaison between administration and classroom teachers.

So, well I work in the field so I guess I have a little bit of an understanding there maybe more so than other parents.

Very much so [understanding of IPP process]. And it's because it's presented at the meetings, you know, well presented and there's tons of literature out there for you to educate yourself on it.

I do now [understand the process]. Not in the beginning, it was overwhelming.

I find them a no-brainer.

I still am confused about the IPP process, and you know, I consider myself to be a fairly educated person. I've gone on different websites to view it, I even attended a special education policy committee meeting with the department of education, saw their new form coming out for next year, saw it matched their software. And I still feel like the IPP process is as good as a business plan is without the people around it to make it happen. And that's why I find it a confusing process.

I hope so. I hope so, he's going into grade five, so I hope so. I think I do.

In a study where 84 parents of students with special needs were sent questionnaires, Garriott, Wandry, and Snyder (2000) found that 42% of the open-ended responses seemed to indicate parents were taking a passive role in the IEP meeting. It could be said that parents attended meetings to be informed of progress, and to find out what educators had planned for their children. Results from the current study seem to

indicate that parents took on active roles in the IPP meetings. It seems they attend meetings to provide input to educators, work collaboratively with educators to come up with goals, discuss progress, and advocate for their children's rights:

I'm just fighting for my daughter's rights? You know what I mean, like, I'm her voice, you know? That's my role, you know, because I know her best. So I just, yeah, I need to make sure that she gets treated fairly and stuff, yeah.

I kind of had to fight for first of all to get her the help she needed it just wasn't forth coming because we weren't sure of all her medical concerns when she started grade primary or how bad her learning disability was going to be so it started with no help whatsoever the first year then we gradually got a little bit I just had to keep fighting the whole time and saying she has the same right as anyone else to an education so you had to provide the support.

To be as involved as I possibly can, to know what he's doing in school and what would be the best avenue to keep going with that he can learn.

I think my role is follow up and supporting what they are putting in place. So if they're putting something in place that we both agree that that's what they're putting in place, like the time out room for her.

Well just definitely seeing to his needs, and what he should be working on, how he can achieve the IPP goals, and working on that stuff at home as well.

As a related topic under the heading of parent knowledge, parents were asked whether they felt prepared for the first IPP meeting. Some parents indicated they were prepared for the IPP process because of similarities to their employment, support from outside agencies, parental support groups, and self-knowledge:

No. Not totally prepared.

Semi-prepared. We had been involved in a parent support group. So having listened to some of that and the Student Services person actually come and spoke to our group, so I felt, yeah, I felt somewhat prepared because I had that background behind me that a lot of people may not have.

No, I felt outside of the box because I had no information. I had no knowledge. So as a parent, you research, you dig into what you need to know in order to be a team player with teachers, principals, school psychologists, because it is your

child, right? It's no one else's child, it's your child. So you need to be on par, and that's through knowledge.

Not overly [prepared]. Well, I mean it was all new, right, so I kind of had to do some research on my own.

Yes, just only because I know my child, so really there was no other preparation.

No. No, not totally, but I can tell you that I probably had a better – when I talked to, even after the meeting was over and we finished talking to the resource teacher, the resource teacher even said, I was probably better prepared than most parents that she'd ever come across coming into an IPP meeting.

I might have thought I was prepared at the time, but in hindsight I realize that there was probably a lot of information that I needed to have before I went into the program.

As another related topic under the heading of parent knowledge, parents were asked how they felt during the first IPP meeting. Some parents indicated they felt overwhelmed, scared, aware, and glad during the first IPP meeting:

It was a bit frightening. I felt anxious going to the first IPP meeting.

Oh scary, [the first IPP meeting] was overwhelming, yeah. Yeah, it was overwhelming because especially the whole word, IPP, and then there's obviously lots of paperwork involved.

It was a little intimidating.

And I did find it difficult in the beginning, because the thing is that you have to realize when people are talking about your kid, you're not always hearing everything.

Well I kind of suspected it, with my background I knew about IPPs.

It was tough to take.

I thought it was great.

I wasn't overly crazy about it, but I knew that it would be the only option that he had.

Improvements to the IPP process

Fish (2006) asked parents what could be done to improve the IEP meetings. Parents responded that more parental involvement was needed. The participants in the current study were not directly asked how the process could be improved upon. Several parents, however, identified themes that could be considered as improvements to the IPP process. Therefore, a category that addressed parents concerns about improving the IPP process was warranted. Some of these suggestions include how to better prepare parents for their first IPP meetings, how to prepare parents for the transition stages once their child has completed their education, how schools should be open to outside agencies, how educational assistants should be included more in the process, and how teachers need more training on inclusive education:

But okay, there are policies around transition, for example. Maybe we need to mandate that when you hit a certain age or whatever, that those policies are handed out in paper copy to the parents around the table. I'm sure some teachers do it, probably some don't, because there's probably more Department of Education policy out there that I'm not aware of that would be useful if I was.

They need to be more open to outside consultants.

I'd like to see a system where new parents coming in have parent advocates that sit down beside them, and it can be overwhelming I know to some people. That would be a nice thing to add for new parents, I think.

I do think the meetings should be longer than what they are.

So like you know, if there's problems, to make sure that the principal there, the TA – oh yeah, and that's one thing I don't agree with. The TA can't sit in on the IPP meetings. That is a huge, huge detriment to the process because they're the ones who deal with most of these behaviours. And then their information is relayed to the teacher, and the teacher wasn't really there in the behaviour, so it doesn't stick out in their mind as much.

But it would be really good for parents to know that when they sign that academic IPP, that it continues each and every year. It's not like you re-sign it every year. It's not like I can just sign it for this year. It continues on.

So I feel fortunate in a lot of ways, but I know there's a lot of people who do struggle. But I definitely do think more education needs to go into special needs, and I don't know how much of the personal development days is involved with that, if any.

Because the student program assistant never sits in on the IPP, which I think he should. I think that would be, you know, he's probably just daily giving the lowdown on, you know, because Anne goes to YSF a lot.

I think the earlier you start IPPs, the better. I think they work better.

CHAPTER IV

Summary

In this study eight parents of children on IPPs were interviewed in order to access their perceptions of the IPP process in Nova Scotia. Each parent was interviewed using a guided interview format consisting of 16 questions (Appendix A). The questions were based on the literature regarding parental perceptions of the Individual Education Plan.

The information garnered from the interviews with parents of children on IPPs can be categorized into four major themes. The first theme, Educator-Parent Communication, identified several areas where the communication between educators and parents influenced the IPP process in a positive or negative manner. For instance, some parents indicated that they felt the IPP was a formality or a form-filling exercise. Similar sentiments were expressed in Cooper (1996). Other parents felt that they were not included in the process of coming up with goals for their son or daughter, which is consistent with previous research (Frankl, 2005 & Fish, 2008). Some parents went as far as to say the process was a waste of time. Similarly, some parents did not feel respected by educators during the IPP process, which corresponds with results in Garriott, Wandry, and Snyder (2000). Other parents, however, felt they had considerable input into their child's program. They felt like their opinions were heard and valued in the context of the IPP. Along the same line, some parents felt like respected contributing members of the IPP team. Although some parents may not have felt respected, the majority of parents indicated that there were few disagreements, and that they got along well with educators in most cases. This finding appears to contradict results from Fish (2008). Another common theme was how parents felt educators perceived them. Most parents reported

they forcefully advocated during their child's IPP meetings, and were perhaps seen as being difficult to work with by educators. This theme was also found in Fish (2006). Another theme that appeared was collaboration with educators when formulating the IPP. Some parents did not feel they were fully collaborating with educators when developing goals for their child. Yet, some parents felt they were fully included in the IPP process.

The second major theme, Parental Perception of Educational Climate, identified several areas where certain school policies, rules, or issues of leadership have influenced the IPP process. One theme that emerged was that some parents felt rushed during the IPP meetings. These parents stated that the meetings were not long enough to actually finish what needed to be done. Although some parents felt the meeting was rushed, most parents thought the schools were very accommodating in terms of scheduling the meetings. Many parents felt that the leadership of the school was a determining factor in the success of the IPP. In some cases parents indicated that it was the resource teacher or the principal that set the attitude for the IPP process. Similar results were found in Cooper (1996) and Tennant (2007). Along similar lines, some parents perceived that administration and resource teachers were knowledgeable about the process. Other parents felt that some educators understood the process, whereas others did not.

The third major theme, Parent Knowledge, identified many areas that could be seen as unique to the majority of parental experiences during the IPP process. For example, parents were asked if they understood the IPP process. The majority of parents indicated that they currently understood the IPP process. Fish (2008) also determined that many parents felt they understood the IEP process. Some parents indicated that they thought the process was initially confusing, but that they had gained considerable

experience since. Similarly, most parents did not feel adequately prepared for the first IPP meeting. Some parents did, however, feel prepared for the initial meeting. Some parents relied on past work experience, while others learned as much as possible about the process prior to the meeting. When asked how parents felt during the first meeting, many parents indicated they felt scared and overwhelmed. Others welcomed the IPP, thinking that it would benefit their child. When asked what their roles were as parents, some responded that they felt they were to advocate for their child's rights. Others indicated that being involved as much as possible and supporting their child was the proper role. Garriott, Wandry, and Snyder (2000) found that many parents chose a passive role in the IEP process.

The fourth major theme, Improvements to the IPP process, encompassed ideas from parents on how the IPP process could be improved. For instance, one parent felt that the transition phase should be implemented once a child on an IPP becomes a certain age. Some parents felt that schools needed to be more open to outside consultants. One parent felt that there should be a system where experienced parents came to help out parents who were new to the IPP process. Other parents felt that the teacher's assistant (TA) should be more involved in the IPP meeting. Parents felt that since the TA is with the student for a great deal of time throughout the school day, they should be included in the meetings to provide feedback. Parents in the current study generated several ideas on how the process could be improved. Parents in Fish (2006) indicated that more parental involvement was needed to improve the process.

CHAPTER V

Limitations and Recommendations

Limitations of the Research

1. The findings in this study may also be limited by the fact that parents being interviewed were aware that this project was being completed as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in School Psychology. Since there is potential for the researcher to gain employment in the public school system in Nova Scotia, parents may have been wary to fully disclose their experiences, or perhaps explain their experiences in a more favorable light. Along similar lines, parents may have been reluctant to fully disclose their experiences because the interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed.
2. Again, the researcher conducting this study could potentially be employed in the public school system in Nova Scotia, and therefore there is the potential for researcher bias. To offset researcher bias, however, the researcher's supervisor, oversaw the interpretation of the transcripts from parental interviews.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future research could focus on accessing a larger population in Nova Scotia. An Internet based survey sent to parents could be a convenient way of accessing parental perceptions surrounding the IPP process. An Internet based survey will alleviate the scheduling of interviews, and may ease hesitations around participating in an audiotaped interview.
2. Although not a focus of the current study, an important area for future research could be to do an in depth examination on how parents feel the IPP process could be improved. Such research has not been conducted on a large scale since the publication of the Report

to the Special Education Review Committee that reviewed the Special Education Policy of 1996 (Department of Education, 2001).

3. Although the primary focus of the current study is parental perceptions of the IPP process, it could be beneficial for future research to focus on perceptions of pre-service teachers. Specifically, future research could focus on the perceptions of pre-service teachers in regard to parents and parental involvement in the IPP process.

Recommendations for Teacher Educators and Educators

1. The initial IPP meeting can be very intimidating for parents. The process usually consists of one or two parents walking into a room with several educators. Parents can feel overwhelmed by such formality. Care should be taken in approaching the situation initially. Contact should be made explaining to parents how many people will be at the meeting and what their roles will be.

2. During the meeting, especially the initial meeting, information should be provided to parents about the process in writing so it can be read during or after the meeting. Parents may be anxious at the time of the meeting. As some parents have noted it can be difficult to process information when once becoming emotional.

3. Parents have noted that they can, at times, become emotional. In most cases it was reported that they were just trying to ensure their son or daughter was getting all of the services they needed. It is important to empathize with parents and try to understand where they are coming from.

4. If it is possible, invite the parents into the process of developing goals earlier. This may alleviate opinions of the meetings being rushed, and could enhance the lack of collaboration that some parents felt.

5. Parents feel that they are the experts when it comes to their children and, thus, they want respect for their knowledge. If educators implement strategies based on parental knowledge when developing an IPP this will enhance feelings of collaboration between parents and educators. Accessing parental knowledge could be as simple as asking about their son or daughter's strengths or preferences.

6. Another theme that emerged from this current study was that teachers needed training in reacting to frustrations expressed by parents in an empathetic way. Many parents interviewed in this study stated that at one point during their history of IPP meetings they became emotional, upset, or frustrated with educators. Therefore, education programs at universities should explicitly teach their students how to work with parents in a caring and empathetic manner.

Recommendations for Parents

1. It is important to initiate follow-ups with the school after the meetings. Schools often have several students on IPPs and do not typically follow up with parents. Parents interviewed for this study often contacted the school to check in on progress with educators.

2. According to some parents interviewed in this study the first IPP meeting can be quite intimidating. Parents interviewed for this research suggested that it would be beneficial to meet with parents who have participated in the process before the very first IPP meeting. It would also be beneficial to bring along an experienced parent to the very first IPP meeting to help ease feelings of intimidation or fear.

3. Educate yourself on the IPP process and your rights as parents with the documents provided by the Department of Education. Ask knowledgeable parents about their experiences with the IPP process.
4. Parents interviewed suggested it would be beneficial to attempt to check all emotions at the door. The parents in this study stated that the educators in the meetings tended to focus on the emotional parents, which detracted from the IPP process.
5. Bring someone to take notes or for support. Some parents noted that it is difficult to take notes and listen to what is being said at the same time. Also, parents noted it was good to debrief after the meeting with someone else who attended the meeting.
6. Some parents noted that the IPP meetings could be rushed. To save time and ensure that parent's voices were heard, some parents suggested writing down ideas prior to the meeting.
7. Parents interviewed here feel that it is important to go through the IPP process for their child. Parents in this study took an active role as an advocate for their child. They considered themselves an important part of the process. The parents interviewed here are prime examples of how valuable parents are to the IPP process; although it could be overwhelming at times for the majority of newcomers.

CHAPTER VI

References

- American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Children with Disabilities (1999). The pediatricians' role in development and implementation of an individual education plan (IEP) and/or an individual family service plan (IFSP). *Pediatrics*, 14(1), 124-127.
- Bogdan, R.C., & Biklen, S.K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods (3rd ed.)*. Toronto, ON: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bunch, G. (1994). Canadian perspectives on inclusive education from there to here: The passage to inclusive education. *Exceptionality Education Canada*, 4 (3 & 4), 19-35.
- Carnine, D., & Granzin, A. (2001). Setting learning expectations for students with disabilities. *School Psychology Review*, 30(4), 466-472.
- Conroy, T., Yell, M.L., & Katsiyannis, A. (2008). Schaffer v. Weast: The Supreme Court on the burden of persuasion when challenging IEPs. *Remedial and Special Education*, 29(2), 108-117. doi: 10.1177/0741932508317273
- Cooper, P. (1996). Are individual education plans a waste of paper? *British Journal of Special Education*, 23(3), 115-119.
- Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S., & Giardina, M.D. (2006). Disciplining qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 19(6), 769-782.
doi:10.1080/0951839060075990
- Edmunds, A.L., & Edmunds G. (2008). *Special Education in Canada (1st ed.)*. McGraw-Hill, Ryerson.
- Edmunds, A. (2000). Teachers' perceived needs to become more effective inclusion

- practitioners: A single school study. *Exceptionality Education Canada*, 10 (3), 3-23.
- Edmunds, A. (1998). Classroom teachers are not prepared for the inclusive classroom. *Exceptionality Education Canada*, 8 (2), 27-40.
- Fish, W.W. (2008). The IEP meeting: Perceptions of parents of students who receive special education services. *Preventing School Failure*, 53(1), 8-14.
- Fish, W. (2006). Perceptions of parents of students with autism towards the IEP meeting: A case study of one family support group chapter. *Education*, 127(1), 56-68.
- Flick, U. (2007). Preface. In U. Flick (Ed.), *Doing Interviews: The SAGE qualitative research kit*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Frankl, C. (2005). Managing individual education plans: Reducing the load of the special educational needs coordinator. *Support for Learning*, 20(2), 77-82.
- French, C. (1998). *Educators' perceptions of the IPP process*. Halifax, NS: Nova Scotia Teachers Union.
- Garriott, P.P., Wandry, D., & Snyder, L. (2000). Teachers as parents, parents as children: What's wrong with this picture? *Preventing School Failure*, 45(1), 37-43.
- Goepel, J. (2009). Education plan: Confusion or collaboration? *Support for Learning*, 24(3), 126-131.
- Hesse-Biber, S.N., & Leavy, P. (2004). Distinguishing qualitative research. In S.N. Hesse-Biber, & P. Leavy (Eds.), *Approaches to qualitative research: A reader on theory and practice* (pp. 1-15). New York: Oxford.
- Konya-Weishaar, M. (2001). The regular educator's role in the individual education plan process. *The Clearing House*, 75(2), 96-98.

- Lingard, T. (2001). Does the *Code of Practice* help secondary school SENCOs to improve learning? *British Journal of Special Education*, 28(4), 187-190.
- Martin, J.E., Van Dycke, J.L., Greene, B. A., Gardner, J.E., Christensen, W.R., Woods, L.L., & Lovett, D.L. (2006). Direct observation of teacher-directed IEP meetings: Establishing the need for student IEP meeting instruction. *Exceptional Children*, 72(2), 187-200.
- Martin, J.E., Marshall, L.H., & Sale, P. (2004). A 3-year study of middle, junior high , and high school, IEP. *Exceptional Children*, 70(3), 285-297.
- Nova Scotia. Department of Education. *Program planning: A team approach*. Nova Scotia: Author.
- Nova Scotia. Department of Education (2008). *Special Education Policy*. Nova Scotia: Author. doi: 371.95'09716-dc22
- Nova Scotia. Department of Education (2006). *The program planning process: A guide for parents*. Nova Scotia: Author. doi: 371.10207
- Nova Scotia. Department of Education (2001). *Report of the special education implementation review committee*. Nova Scotia: Author.
- Office of Special Education Programs (2000). *History: Twenty-five years in educating children with disabilities through IDEA*. Washington, DC. Author.
- Ottawa. House of Commons. *Constitution Act. Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Saskatchewan: Regina, 1982.
- Richards, L. & Morse, J.M. (2007). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods (2nd ed.)*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, California.
- Strauss, A.L. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and*

procedures for developing grounded theory. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, California.

The Education Act [Nova Scotia]. 2002, c. 5, ss. 8-16. ULR:

<http://nslegislature.ca/legc/statutes/eductn.htm>

Tike-Bafra, L., & Kargin, T. (2009). Investigating the attitudes of elementary school teachers, school psychologists and guidance research center personnel on the process of preparing the individualized educational program and challenges faced during the related process. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 9(4), 1959-1972.

Tennant, G. (2007). IEPs in mainstream secondary schools: an agenda for research.

Support for Learning, 22(4), 204-208.

Tod, J. (1999). IEPs: Inclusive educational practices? *Support for Learning*, 14(4), 184-188.

Vaughn, S., Bos, C.S., & Schumm, J.S. (2007). Teaching students who are exceptional, diverse, and at risk in the general education classroom. Boston: Pearson Education.

Wedell, (2001). When is an IEP worth the paper it is written on? *British Journal of Special Education*, 28(1), 45-46.

CHAPTER VI
Appendix A
Guiding Interview Questions

Introduction

Hi, my name is Derry, and I am going to be asking you a number of questions about your experiences as a parent that has been involved in the IPP process for your child. Although I am conducting this research for my Master's Thesis at Mount Saint Vincent, I am not affiliated with any school board. Anything you say will remain anonymous and confidential. You can share your opinions and experiences even if they are good or bad. No one will be able to identify you through this research.

1. What did it feel like when you were first told your child was going to be placed on an IPP?
2. What was that first IPP process like for you as a parent?
3. As a parent entering the process for the first time, did you feel prepared? Respected?
4. Do you want, or feel your child should be included in the process of developing IPP outcomes?
5. How convenient is the scheduling for the IPP meetings?
6. Does the school follow up with you after the meeting?
7. What does the school do to ensure you understand what's being done in these meetings?
8. Do you ever show up and the IPP is already formulated without your opinion, and all you have to do is sign it?
9. I want to read you a quote: "In terms of the program planning process, further efforts need to be made to ensure that meaningful parental involvement occurs" (Department of Education, 2001). This quote is in the special education policy. Tell me what you think of this quote?
10. How well do you get along with educators in IPP meetings? What do you agree on? What do you disagree on?
11. Do you feel you understand the IPP process? What would you like to learn more about?

12. Do you feel like educators take what you have to say about your child seriously?
13. Do you feel like educators understand the IPP process?
14. What is your understanding about your role as a parent in the IPP process?
15. If you have been participating in this process for a length of time, what have you learned at the start of your experiences compared to what you know now?
16. Is there anything you were hoping I asked you and I didn't?

Appendix B
Demographic Survey

Gender: Male ___ Female ___

Age: ___ 20-24years old ___ 25-29 ___ 30-34 ___ 35-39 ___ 40-44 ___ 45-49 ___ 50+

Education: ___ High School ___ College ___ University ___

Highest Secondary or Post-Secondary Level:

Diploma (title) _____

Degree (title) _____

Specialized Training: _____

Number of children in your household: _____

Number of children in your household on IPPs: _____

At what age was your child first placed on an IPP? _____

How long has your child been on an IPP? _____

Appendix C

Request to Recruit Participants

Dear _____:

My name is Michael MacKichan. I am completing my Masters of Arts in School Psychology at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am currently involved in a supervised research project, as part of my graduate thesis, entitled “Parental Perceptions of the Individual Program Planning (IPP) Process.” By conducting this research project, I hope to assess how parents feel about the development of an individual program plan for their child. This project is significant not only for the information it will generate, but also for the possibility of improvement in the IPP process if it is warranted.

By contacting you, I it is my hope that you will relay information about this study to parents who are members of your organization. If you distribute the information about this study, the parents can then choose to participate in this study. The parents will then contact me, and set up a time to participate in a semi-structured interview. The interview could take anywhere from 1 to 2 hours. All ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw without consequence, safe storage of data, and shredding of data upon project completion, are required for a study of this nature. The Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board (UREB) has approved this study. If you have any questions, please contact me, Michael MacKichan, at michael.mackichan@msvu.ca or my project supervisor, Dr. Mary Jane Harkins, at Mount Saint Vincent University, 457-6595 (or at: maryjane.harkins@msvu.ca). In addition, the Chair of the UREB, Dr. Michelle Eskritt-Keck, may be reached at 457-6593 (michelle.eskritt@msvu.ca).

Thank you for taking time to consider my request. I will be in contact with you to discuss the possibility of your agency participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Michael MacKichan

Student at Mount Saint Vincent University, M.A.S.P (Candidate)

Appendix D

General Request to Participate Parent

Dear _____:

My name is Michael MacKichan. I am completing my Masters of Arts in School Psychology at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am currently involved in a supervised research project, as part of my graduate thesis, entitled “Parental Perceptions of the Individual Program Planning (IPP) Process.” By conducting this research project, I hope to assess how parents feel about the development of an individual program plan for their child. This project is significant not only for the information it will generate, but also for the possibility of improvement in the IPP process if it is warranted.

I would appreciate being able to meet with yourself to discuss your feelings toward the individual program planning process for your child. Our meetings could last 1 to 2 hours and will be audio taped (with your permission). All ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw without consequence, emotional support (if needed), duty to report any disclosure of abuse, safe storage of data, and shredding of data upon project completion, are required for a study of this nature. The Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board (UREB) has approved this study. If you have any questions, please contact me, Michael MacKichan, at michael.mackichan@msvu.ca or my project supervisor, Dr. Mary Jane Harkins, at Mount Saint Vincent University, 457-6595 (or at: maryjane.harkins@msvu.ca). In addition, the Chair of the UREB, Dr. Michelle Eskritt-Keck, may be reached at 457-6593 (michelle.eskritt@msvu.ca).

Thank you for taking time to consider my request. I will be in contact with you to discuss the possibility of your agency participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Michael MacKichan

Student at Mount Saint Vincent University, M.A.S.P (Candidate)

Appendix E

Letter of Informed Consent

I, _____, have been fully
(please print)

informed of the nature of my participation in this study entitled “Parental Perceptions of the Individual Program Planning Process.” I understand that my participation in this study will be entirely voluntary, anonymous, confidential, and I can withdraw at any time without consequence. I also understand that the data will be properly stored and shredded upon completion of this project. During the semi-structured interviews, strong feelings from past experiences regarding the individual program planning process may arise. The researcher will be available to provide immediate support, as well as direct you available resources through your agency or community resources if agency resources are unavailable. I understand that I am able to take a break at any time, or withdraw from the study, if subject matter becomes too difficult to discuss. I also understand that the researcher will report, to the appropriate authorities, any disclosures of harm, abuse, or neglect. I also understand that my interview will be audio taped to ensure data retention and accuracy. I understand that the Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board (UREB) has approved this research. If I have any questions I will contact Michael MacKichan at michael.mackichan@msvu.ca or his project supervisor, Dr. Mary Jane Harkins, at Mount Saint Vincent University, 457-6595 (or at: maryjane.harkins@msvu.ca). In addition, I could contact the Chair of the UREB, Dr. Michelle Eskritt-Keck, at 457-6593 (michelle.eskritt@msvu.ca).

I have read the above information. I understand that by signing below that I am agreeing to participate in this research study.

Name _____ (please print)

Signature _____

Date _____

Note: A copy of this form will be given to you

Appendix F

Informed Consent for Audio Taping of Interviews

I, _____, have been
(please print)

informed that my participation in this study entitled “Parental Perceptions of the Individual Program Planning Process,” will be audio taped for transcription and data analysis. If I have any questions I will contact Michael MacKichan at michael.mackichan@msvu.ca or his project supervisor, Dr. Mary Jane Harkins, at Mount Saint Vincent University, 457-6595 (or at: maryjane.harkins@msvu.ca). In addition, I could contact the Chair of the UREB, Dr. Michelle Eskritt-Keck, at 457-6593 (michelle.eskritt@msvu.ca).

I have read the above information. I understand that by signing below that I am agreeing to participate in this research study.

Name _____ (please print)

Signature _____

Date _____

Note: A copy of this form will be given to you

Appendix G

Contact Information of Disability Organizations in the Event of Undue Stress

Disability Organizations Contact Information:

Provincial Autism Center: 1-902-446-4995 or 1-877-544-4495 (Toll free)

Learning Disabilities Society of Nova Scotia: 1-902-423-2850 or 1-877-238-5322 (Toll free)

Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority: 1-902-424-8500

Nova Scotia Association for Community Living: 1-902-469-1174

Contact Information for Community Resources for Parents from a Rural School Board:

Hugh J. Haley Ph.D. (Psychologist): 1-902-863-6370

St. Martha's Regional Hospital Outpatient Mental Health: 1-902-867-4500, ext: 4345