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Parental Involvement with Special Needs Children in A Rural School District

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IN A RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Dissertation

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By

Mary E. Helt Lenda

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ABSTRACT

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN

IN A RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

By

Mary E. Helt Lenda

August 2009

Dissertation supervised by Phil Belfiore

Formalized education has been around for a long time and the role of the parents has been to facilitate their child's academic success. The quality of parenting can vary widely. This study will explore parental involvement in their special needs child's educational process. More specifically, parental involvement with special needs children in a rural school district is the focus explored in the south western New York quadrant of Chautauqua County. Using Baumrind's (1967) research on parenting styles as a framework, the purpose of study is to (a) investigate the styles of parental involvement with children of special needs in rural elementary schools, (b) determine if there are specific challenges for parents of special needs children in these rural schools, and (c) determine if any additional responsibilities exist specific to these parents of special needs children in a rural school setting.

According to Blancher (2003), the family is one of the most sacred, prominent and studied institutions in America. Although research is limited in the area of parental involvement with Special Education children in a rural community, this study will discuss the involvement of parents in a multifaceted set of focus group discussions from specific behaviors that emerge from four parenting styles (Baumrind, 1967). In light of this limited research, Epstein (1995) states that research does document that children will try harder when parents get involved with their child's education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For as long as there has been formalized education, the role of the parents has been to facilitate their child's academic success. Dunlap (1999) suggests parents and family members can offer the most stable environment to a child. The National Center for Learning Disabilities acknowledges that parents are their children's first teachers (Tuttle & Paquette, 1993). Mandates for child care with disabilities have been handed down with the implementation of Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), to include the parent in their child's educational developmental progress through the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) process (Yell & Shriner, 1997). In addition, the family is essential in the planning and delivery of educational supports. Educational strategies have a better chance at success when they are implemented with the parent and school involved in a joint relationship with the child as the central focus. The optimal level of school participation should be based on family characteristics, stressors affecting the family, and the needs of the individual child (Iovannone, Dunlap, Huber, & Kincaid, 2003). Interventions and strategies for parental involvement are attainable through multiple collaborative efforts.

The quality of parenting young children varies. Parental involvement in their child's educational process can be (a) participatory in that the parent is actively involved with the child's education or (b) non-participatory with little interaction with the child's educational process. Additionally, an argument can be made that if parents were given the tools to improve the quality of parenting their child then their quality of parenting would improve (Bandura, 1967).

Parental involvement, or lack thereof, will determine the environment that facilitates educational progress and achievement (Cooper & Nye, 1994; Salend & Garjria, 1995). Research (Epstein, 1991) has pointed to the fact that parental involvement does positively affect children's learning over time. However, this same research also documented a decrease in the actual amount of time parents were involved in their children's educational process. Two-parent working income family and single parent households could account for the decreased levels of parental contribution since these factors would leave less time for the parent to be involved with their child's educational advancement or growth. As a direct counter to this phenomenon, it has been demonstrated that, the efforts of teachers and schools can substantially increase parental involvement (Epstein, 1991).

Parents of children with special needs have the same responsibilities as other parents, but often parenting is accompanied by feelings of loneliness, frustration, and isolation. These parents need support in order to learn how to advocate for their children within the family unit, the educational system, and the community (Tuttle, & Paquette, 1993).

In the late 1960's Diana Baumrind researched parenting styles and established distinct differences. Four unique parenting styles emerged from her research. These parenting styles are authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and the uninvolved parent These four parenting styles are categorized according to parenting sensitivity and the degree of demands placed upon the child. Baumrind's (1967) research supports the idea that the social competence of a child has direct correlation to the behaviors and the attitude of the parent. For children with special needs, the quality of their parents to

parent will directly encroach on the child's academic success. Parental dedication to their child's education provides the driving force to educational success. Parents facilitate educational performance with their children through reinforcements that help their child to self-manage.

PURPOSE

Parents of children with special needs may feel they have additional parental responsibility than parents of a child without special needs. These perceived responsibilities might result in such issues as frustration, a lack of skills or a lack of services provided to these children. These effects could exacerbate already existing problems in parenting a child with special needs. Using Baumrind's (1967) research on parenting styles as a framework, the purpose of this study is (1) to investigate the styles of parental involvement with children of special needs in rural elementary schools, (2) to determine if there are specific challenges for parents of special needs children in rural schools, and (3) to determine if any additional responsibilities exist specific to these parents of special needs children in a rural school setting.

PROBLEM

Although the topic of parental and family involvement with children with and without disabilities has been extensively researched (e.g. Dunlap, 1999; Eccles & Harold, 1993) there is a lack of research on the population of rural parents with special needs children. Fiene and Taylor (1991) conducted a study of the Appalachian community and concluded that environmental constraint, familial structure and limitations interrelated to social structure, will determine the parental role.

It is important that educators understand the impact a child with disabilities has on the rural family. Parenting isn't a job accompanied with instructions; nor is it necessarily inherent to feel comfortable with the parenting role. Biological equipment to conceive children does not guarantee that an adult will make a good parent. Good parenting comes with practice and through learning techniques that are often developed and cultivated over time. What makes good parents and determines what skills need to be developed, especially for those who have children with special needs, often is ascertained by the involvement in their child's educational development that is required when working with the school and social services.

A recent research study, (O'Dell, & Schaefer, 2005) examined rural compliance issues of IDEA and how these issues are viewed in rural Americana. In the O'Dell and Schaefer (2005) study some of the teacher participants claimed that parent participation took advantage of the system regarding IDEA. When services are started for a special needs child there is another set of problems that transpire. Parents experience a range of emotions (Geenen, Powers & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001). Frequently parents will feel as if they are alone, bobbing aimlessly in an ocean with no land in sight. In addition, parents now have to deal with the scheduling of an entire group of therapists who come into their home to provide services for this child. Parents may feel control is being taken away; they may develop an "I know they are watching me" attitude.

The goal of parents should be to parent successfully (Honig, 1999) although there are no easy answers. Childrearing is time consuming and demands parental involvement and responsibilities. This demand compels parents to divide their time between themselves, their special needs child, and any other siblings. Parents who have an open

mind about their child's disability often utilize available resources successfully and, as a result, sometimes fare much better than parents who don't know how to accept their child's disability. Fiene and Taylor (1991) suggested that the mother is often involved the most, but it is the father who makes essential decisions about the family. Fathers may blame themselves and have difficulty accepting a child with special needs. Siblings feel the effect caused by the parent's focused direction of energy towards the child with special needs.

The resources that are available to the parents can depend on the demographics and the economic structure of the area. A multitude of studies have documented the interrelationship between family economics, parental literacy levels, ethnic background, marital status, employment, number of siblings and even the age of the parent(s) (Eccles, 1984). The non-support of government-funded mandates has dramatically curtailed the monies available for these families, although schools are required, by law, to include the parent in the Individual Education Program process. This mandate has actually strengthened the role of the parent in their child's educational development, (Yell & Shriner, 1997). Other outlying variables that impact the ability to provide resources to encourage parental involvement include transportation problems due to distance from resource locations, vehicle availability, time constraints due to busy rural lifestyles, and a lack of effective tools for increasing parenting skills and involvement. Given all this it is important that educators understand the impact a child with disabilities has on the rural family.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research questions will be studied:

1. In reference to Baumrind's theory (1967), what are the styles of parental involvement with children of special needs in rural elementary schools?
2. Are there specific challenges for parents of special needs children in rural schools? These challenges can be defined as the difficulty in finding appropriate services specific to the needs of their child. (These challenges can be defined as the multitude of difficulties encountered when attempting to find appropriate services that meet the specific needs of individual children.)
3. Are there additional responsibilities parents of special needs children face as a result of living in a rural area? Responsibilities that parents face can be defined as providing and allowing appropriate care within the guidelines of IDEA.

LIMITATIONS

1. This study is limited to the geographic area of Chautauqua County rural school districts.
2. Additional limitation will be the parent participants of the children who are classified specifically as requiring special educational services.
3. Limitations will be due to parents who volunteer to participate in this study. It was predetermined that a limitation of the sample population might be weighted by parents who had a particular parenting style. In light of this limited research, Epstein, (1995) states that research does document that children will try harder when parents get involved with their child's education.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Developmental disability: Children who have cognitive, psychosocial, fine motor, gross motor, language, and physical delays.

Developmental Delay: Children who are performing academically, socially or physically below his or her chronically appropriate developmental level.

Elementary: Public school, grades kindergarten to second grade

Environmental constraints: Areas or surroundings that prohibit normal access to needed services.

Familial structure: Families that are single, traditional, gay, lesbian or extended in nature.

IDEA: Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, a federal law requiring early intervention assessment and services for children with disabilities.

IEP: Individual Educational Plan that guides the educational outcomes for a child with special needs.

Mandate: Legislation passed by the general assembly and signed into law by the executive branch that requires school districts to follow directives on policies and procedures.

Parent efficacy: A parent's perception or belief in his or her own ability to be a good parent.

Parental involvement: The degree of parent participation in the development of the child's educational plan.

Parenting: Parental strategies that facilitate the child's educational performance.

Rural: All territory, population, and housing units located outside of urbanized area or an urban cluster.

Social structure: Classification of family based on annual income. Families are classified as lower, middle, or upper income class.

Special Needs: Children with developmental disabilities or developmental delays

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research is limited in the area of parental involvement with Special Education children in a rural community. In light of this limited research, researchers do say that children will try harder when parents get involved with their child's education (Epstein, 1995). In America, the family is one of the most sacred, prominent and studied institutions (Blancher, 2003). This chapter will examine the literature for the rationale of parental involvement with special needs children in a rural school district, family structure, parental stressors, psychological and social benefits of parenting, parenting efficacy, and parenting styles. Literature on the involvement of parents will be examined from several viewpoints including the following: (a) parenting styles in light of Baumrind's theoretical framework; (b) the nurturing of parents, (Honig, 1999); (c) different aspects encountered by single parents; (d) multicultural parenting, and (e) special education and parenting children with special needs in a rural setting.

Baumrind's Theory of Parenting Styles

Involvement of parents is a multifaceted set of activities from specific behaviors that emerge from the parenting styles (Baumrind, 1967). These parenting styles can be categorized according to responsiveness and demandingness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983) and include Baumrind's four parenting styles are the (a) the permissive parent, (b) the authoritarian parent, (c) the authoritative parent and, (d) the uninvolved parent.

Baumrind (1967) describes the first parenting style as permissive parents who make few demands and do not make attempts to shape appropriate behavior for the child. These parents use little discipline, are non-confrontational in nature, but are responsive.

This means that the parent tries to use reason with the child instead of demanding or exerting overt power. The second style, the authoritarian parents are demanding and directive but are not responsive to their children. These parents want results from their children immediately. These parents do not encourage self thought and have a belief that the child should take the parents' word as right. Authoritarian parents value obedience and will use punitive measures to enforce self-will. The third style, the authoritative parents are assertive, demanding, and responsive to their children but not intrusive. These parents encourage interaction and respect the child's individual interest. This is the style which employs reasoning and collaborate style. The authoritative parent will recognize the child wishes, but will set limitations. Finally, the last style, although not often included with the major three mentioned prior, the parents who are low in responsiveness and demandingness fall under the uninvolved parent category in Baumrind's (1967) theory of parenting styles. In extreme cases these parents demonstrate neglectful and rejecting treatment of their children. These parents have inadequate parental involvement skills. Baumrind believed that the social competence of children was a direct consequence of the behaviors and attitudes of the parent. Ultimately Baumrind's research sets the theoretical framework for parental efficacy.

Baumrind's research is widely embraced by parenting researchers; however her study does come under scrutiny. Harris (1998) pointed out that Baumrind's research only looked at the parenting of one child in each family and ignored how other children in the family were parented. Harris went on to suggest another weakness in Baumrind's research was that cultural influences were not taken into account in her research. Further, another flaw Harris believed that had an impact on Baumrind's research was that

Baumrind studied middle-class Anglo-American families. Harris believes that children are influenced primarily by cultural and peer influences, thereby countering Baumrind's research on parenting styles that holds that children are affected by the style of the parenting.

Parenting

Schalock (1986) found that parents who were actively involved in their child's programs saw more successful employment outcomes for the students than those whose parents were not actively involved. However other researches have documented mixed results. Nomaguchi and Milkie's (2003) research indicates that children can add positive and negative aspects to an adult life because the outcomes for parenting children are both detrimental and rewarding. Single parents disclose a higher degree of depression than their married counter parts. Nomaguchi and Milkie (2003) argued that there is a cost factor experienced by parents that obscure the benefits that children may produce. This cost is reflected in the effect of parent status which is determined by gender and marital distinction. Emotional costs for the parents are less happiness or satisfaction with their lives (Bird, 1997). Glenn and McLanahan (1982) suggested that some parents are satisfied with their lives, while other studies stress that parents are less happy than their single counterparts. Evidence for these empirical studies are mixed but a number of studies paint a bleak outlook because, as the studies indicate, having children is more costly to adults in terms of stress, happiness, social relations and psychological well being (McLanahan & Adams 1987).

Nomaguchi and Milkie's (2003) research focused significantly on the cost of parenting while ignoring the beneficial effects that children have on the parent. Their

work provided us with a myriad of approaches to examine how stressors, such as marital conflict and daily tensions, shape adult interactions with children and the quality of parenting. Children can take a substantial toll on their parent's emotional health and the amount of time spent on the task of parenting extracts a toll on physical energy. This time is taken away from the adults' leisure and "down time" (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981), time that is critical for reclaiming one's emotional and physical balance.

Another effect that children have on adult lives is in regards to social integration, although this is a positive effect because adults benefit from parenting in that parenting provides ties to other adults. Social integration is referred to as the existence or quality of social ties and relationships (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988). Psychologically, a major transition occurs in an adult's life when he or she becomes a parent. Identities such as student, spouse, and worker are refashioned to make room for the new obligation of parenting (Cowan & Cowan, 1992). Nomaguchi and Milkie (2003) studied the concept that adults grow in self-confidence and psychological strength when they establish caring relationships with children. Nomaguchi and Milkie support the perception that the quality of parenting hinges on the framework of parenting efficacy. Parents who are involved with their children and create opportunities for the child to interact in a stimulating environment and have the freedom to explore and develop mastery will have children who are socially, cognitively and linguistically advanced (Ainsworth & Bell, 1974). From the caregiver's perspective, there is no replacement for parents who genuinely treasure and are committed to their child's growth and development (Honig, 1999).

Single Parents

Parenting has its difficulties and stress plays a large role in the parent's ability to empathize with the child's needs. Single parents struggle to cope with their own adult problems. Often they are not aware of the importance of early nurturing of children, a crucial step which promotes attachment and bonding to the parent (Honig, 1999). Conversely, there is no reason to assume that single parents are less involved, capable or qualified to parent their children. It is essential that we don't overemphasize or minimize the difficulties that single parents face when it comes to parental involvement with their children.

Despite the societal concerns about single parenting and the extensive research that addresses these issues, Gottlieb (1997) claims there is relatively little research documenting the topic of single mothers who parent a child with disabilities. Gottlieb (1997), states that there is a lack of research that could help us understand how single mothers cope with the emotional and financial burdens of having a family that includes a developmentally delayed child. Single mothers face a duel challenge when raising a child with disabilities. The challenge these mothers encounter includes managing the emotional and financial needs of their family while simultaneously coping with the trials that are faced raising a child with disabilities. Most children with disabilities are not placed in residential facilities and care is provided in the home by the mother (Fujiura, Garza, & Braddock, 1989). There are also increasing pressures for stay-at-home single mothers of school-age children, to get off the welfare roles and be gainfully employed (Ellwood, 1996).

Multicultural Parenting

There is a dearth of research on the topic of multicultural parenting of special needs children. Research often represents middle-class English-speaking cultural values over the values of the working-class and/or culturally diverse parent (McConachie, 1986). Researchers found that these families were more highly involved than their European counterparts (Geenen, et. al., 2001). Statistics gathered over a 25 year period (the length of the mandated educated program for including children with disabilities) reveal a lack of participation from parents of minority cultures (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2000). Often the studies focused on the difficulty that immigrants had parenting their children with disabilities, but this would not be unrealistic since many immigrant families with a disabled child face other hardships that English speaking families do not experience. These hardships would include language barriers, lack of support from an extended family, loneliness, and prejudice.

The challenge for educators, especially with immigrant parents, is how to encourage involvement of parents. Not only is language a deterrent, but often cultural issues must be addressed. For example, specific gender roles may play an important part in their society so that a male child might be offered more educational advantages than a female child. Al-Hassan and Gardner (2001) addressed several barriers that immigrant parents of students with disabilities encountered that restricted their parental involvement in the educational process. One of these barriers is language, which affects the parents' involvement in school functions (Holman, 1997). Immigrant parents often say that their greatest obstacle to helping their child who has a disability is lack of information (Thorpe, 1997). Understanding what obstacles exist and actively working through them

can be the approach which bridges the barriers and helps forge a respectful and collaborative relationship.

Parenting Children with Special Needs in a Rural Setting

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA) is a law which guarantees that all children with a disability have access to a free and appropriate education. Congress originally enacted the basic requirements for IDEA in 1975. This original law was known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142). IDEA [1997] redefined the basics and new provisions were provided for the disciplines. Over the years many revisions have been made with the most recent occurring in 2004. IDEA provides guidance to states and school districts on how they should provide special education services and related services to the special needs children in their district and state. To assist the states in identifying, locating, and evaluating children with disabilities in their state, a program entitled Child Find was implemented. Infants and toddlers with disabilities are identified and an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) is designed to meet the needs of the individual. This is part of the Early Intervention Services (EIS) for children under three. Transition from EIS into a pre-school program or other appropriate placement will follow. All transitioning occurs with the input from the service provider; the family and local education agency (LEA), which would be the local school district. Parents are involved throughout this entire placement process.

Although a number of studies focus on parental involvement, very few look at rural parental involvement. Geenen, et al. (2001) indicated that parental involvement is an important factor in promoting the successful transition of youth with disabilities into adulthood. The majority of the nation's school systems are comprised of school districts

in a rural setting (Helge, 1984). The passage of federal education laws has forced the rural school systems to focus on the needs of children with disabilities and the parents in their school system. Helge, (1984) reported that rural school districts have an advantage over urban schools. These advantages include a high dynamic of trust, close family units, and a sense of belonging to a community. Another advantage is that the rural community will display a willingness to help those with disabilities.

In a 2005 research study, O'Dell & Schaefer explored rural special education issues. They found that important underlying factors to problematic student issues lie not with school but at home. Regardless of the program parents need to be "key players" (O'Dell & Schaefer, 2005).

Summary

In conclusion, the literature highlights the different perspectives in research on parental involvement with special education children. Research has focused on the emotional, social, and marital stressor cost to the adult from the parent experience (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). Ainsworth and Bell (1974) have said that the parents who are involved with their children and create parenting encounters with their children help them to develop socially, cognitively and emotionally. Even the parents who are socioeconomically disadvantaged have the opportunity to interact with their child and the barrier of disadvantaged circumstances should not predict the quality of parental involvement (Bandura, 1997). Research and literature is limited in parental involvement with special education children in the rural community, but data does recognize that parents are the key to minimizing student issues (O'Dell & Schaefer, 2005). When parents are involved with their child, there is an increased likelihood that

their child will perform as a well-adapted child, both socially and cognitively (Ainsworth & Bell, 1974).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study examining parental involvement with children who have special needs, living in a rural setting. Data for this study was collected from a population of parents of special needs children living in rural, south western New York school districts. The children were receiving services through early intervention, pre-school, or early elementary special needs programs.

The Chautauqua County demographic data web site states that Chautauqua County has more farms than any other county in New York State (Chautauqua County Overview, 1999). In addition Chautauqua County rural demographic data shows that out of twenty-six hundred individuals between pre-school and twenty years of age, over two hundred are classified with a disability (United States Census Bureau, 2000). This census data does not break down the disabilities numbers below pre-school ages.

Initiation and facilitation of focus groups in school districts within the southwestern quadrant of New York State was launched and conducted by this researcher. The research procedure used the implementation of several focus group meetings for data collection and provided insight into the parent involvement with special needs children. Data from these focus groups was collected. The purpose of comparing focus group data was to determine if different styles and opinions exist in parenting in rural Chautauqua County. The focus groups established a natural, comfortable setting for the parents of special needs children to discuss specific topics related to the stated purpose of this study.

Sample size of participants was determined by those who responded to information about this focus group in Back-to-School newsletters, and informative presentations made to Parent Steering Committees, Building Team Committees, and Parent-Teacher Committees. From the onset, it was acknowledged by the researcher that the sample population might be weighted by parents who had a particular parenting style and thus be a factor in the limitation of the study. These considerations will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.

Primary caregivers, including parents, guardians, grandparents and foster parents who had children whose ages ranged from birth to seven years including early intervention children, pre-school, and early elementary, were included in this study.

A notice was put in the CLCS newsletter to inform the parents of special needs children. The notice stated:

> A monthly discussion group is forming for parents of students with special needs, from pre-school through second grade, to:
>
> ·Explore the types of parental involvement with children of special needs in a rural elementary school setting;
> ·Determine the specific challenges for parents of special needs children in rural schools; and
> ·Determine what additional responsibilities exist for these parents.
>
> Mary Helt, a district resident who is a doctoral student at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh will facilitate the discussions. More information will be available at the Elementary Open House on Monday, September 19.
>
> Information shared in this group will be used to bring out awareness on areas of concern. All information will be kept in the strictest of confidence.

The intent of a focus group was to discover what people really thought and how they felt about specific topics (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Following Kruger & Casey's (2000) guide to conducting focus groups, this focus group involved a group of parents of

special needs children in a social setting. The purpose of this focus group was to collect data as to identify the types of parental involvement, through group interviews using a qualitative approach of gathering information. The data collected were used to develop an understanding of parenting styles of parents with special needs children. Documentation was collected in the following manner:

Data from the focus group were collected through audio and transcriptions during a focus group setting.

> *Parents were asked about their particular challenges and frustrations they have or were experiencing with their special needs child. (Appendix A)*

Document collecting was recorded in a written journal.

> *The researcher's and parent observations and data collection was recorded for reference in the future.*

Follow up interviews with the focus group was collected during the final scheduled focus group.

> *These interviews reflected back on the original statements of the participating parent. Data was recorded through audio and transcription.*

Overview of the meetings:

Parents met with this researcher who facilitated open-ended discussion questions during four focus group sessions. At the first focus group meeting the researcher introduced the research methodology to the parents of children with special needs. An Ice Breaker activity was conducted to facilitate a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere for the participants. Parents were asked to complete a demographic data sheet, with no identifying data. After this initial meeting, focus group meetings were held once a month

for a minimum of four months. At each meeting the researcher facilitated discussions about parental involvement, specific challenges for parents of special needs children, and responsibilities that exist specific to these parents of special needs. Any unanswered questions were rolled over to the next scheduled focus group meeting. The families were informed that if it was necessary, a follow up meeting could be scheduled to answer and facilitate all questions. The researcher moderated and scribed field notes from the focus group discussions and analyzed data collected from these focus group encounters. The researcher created a coding system when audio taping the participants to insure anonymity and confidentiality.

It was this researcher's goal to create a comfortable environment by developing trust with the participants and to encourage involvement. Data gathered was analyzed around the goals of the study: (1) to identify Baumrind's (1967) levels of parental involvement with children of special needs in rural elementary schools, (2) to determine if there are any specific challenges for parents of special needs children in rural schools, and (3) to determine if there are any additional responsibilities that parents of special needs children face as a result of living in a rural area.

The parents who responded to informational meetings and newsletter notification were the final determining factor for inclusion in the focus groups established in local, rural communities. The researcher guarded confidentiality of all participants (Appendix A). The importance of confidentiality was addressed with all group members. This was assured and accomplished by assigning a non-identifiable coding to each parent. The information the researcher published has no identifiable information on any individual participating parent. The responses were identified through the code assigned to each

parent. Because anonymity was assured, there was no foreseeable risk in participating in the focus group study. Audiotapes were used during interviews and focus groups. These tapes were labeled with the appropriate parent coding and stored in a locked file at the researcher's office. Tapes and transcriptions were maintained at the investigator's home and tapes were erased once no longer needed.

During and following each interview field notes were taken. This allowed the researcher to record data on observations, and offer insights throughout the focus group process. Serving as an additional source of data, field notes increased the validity and reliability of this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

After three attempts to conduct a series of focus group discussions in an educational setting at the community's local school building, there were no perspective participants at all four publically advertised sessions. To continue with this focus group, this researcher felt that another location that was conducive to conversation and discussion had to be found and stay within the community boundaries. Observing that food often is the temptation that encourages gatherings, the researcher settled on holding the focus group session at a popular restaurant. The new location and times were announced in the local paper. The focus group meetings were scheduled for up to four, monthly meetings with each lasting a minimum of an hour with one extra meeting planned in the schedule if the participants felt they needed the extra time for any particular focus group topic discussion.

On each of the planned days, participants entered, found a seat and ordered. The participants would come in and talk to each other, but not about their children until the focus group had started.

The focus group meetings were based around Baumrind's (1967) questions from her research study that she used in classifying parenting styles. The researcher facilitated each of the focus groups around Baumrind's (1967) questions.

Focus Group Week 1:

1. **Determined types of parental involvement with children of special needs, in a rural setting**.

Even though Baumrind's parenting styles includes the uninvolved parent there was no evidence of this parenting pattern and it will not be discussed in the analysis of the responses to the focus group questions.

1.1. *What is your clear cut position on how to raise children with special needs?*

1.1.1. *Most of the responses mirrored the other parents' responses were, "You would have to go day by day…it depends on what is going on in their lives at the time." Another parent participant said that "You go at the best pace for the child." One parent, who had an autistic child, said that her child very often gets focused and interested on one thing. This parent will use that focus and will adapt learning opportunities for the child to make puzzles and activity opportunities. Another of the parent participant stated that there is no clear-cut, tailored thing but she goes with what works and she felt that a parent needs to be flexible.*

1.1.2. Looking at Baumrind's three primary parenting patterns it was difficult to make a determination on any one specific parenting style from these responses. In this focus group question this researcher can narrow the choices to a blend of authoritative and permissive parenting styles. In authoritative style a parent is less likely to use physical punishment and will encourage individualistic and independent behaviors in their child. The

permissive parenting pattern qualities were exhibited in the lack of explicit controls on the child.

1.2. *What generalizations about rearing children with special needs do most families hold?*

1.2.1. *All of the parents who responded to this question were insistent and quite vocal on this response. They felt that the need for an early intervention network is absolutely necessary and it is imperative to receive intervention when you asked for it and need it and not in two months but "right now" was a concept across the board with the parents. One of my parents responded with, "He is who he is." During a second parent's response, the discussion was bitter and her tone implied resentment towards an apparent bad diagnosis. She did not elaborate whether this alleged diagnosis was made prenatally, resulting in her child's disability being caused by a doctor's misdiagnosis, or in the diagnosis of her child's disability. She seemed unwilling to discuss this point any further.*

1.2.2. Based on Baumrind's parent authoritative behavior style, the first parent's response demonstrated tolerance in her child's personality and behavior with her statement, "He is who he is." This response shows more understanding, and that the parent is apt to accept the child's point of view. The second parent demonstrated blame for a prenatal issue and the response doesn't reflect any one of the four parenting styles described by Baumrind.

1.3. *What is a good idea for parents to use in handling their special needs children?*

1.3.1. *The parent participants commented that this was a tough one to answer. The parents brought up whether we were talking about outside help or what they do collectively as a family. The parents stated that they "don't know a lot of parents who have special needs children, just a few here and there." One parent took their child to the Cleveland Clinic to a behavioral specialist for help in handling their child. Throughout this discussion segment the parents reinforced the fact they look for resources and supports from other parents and other support groups. The parents discussed and agreed that accepting the child and the disability was very important as well as them then educating themselves about the disability and resources that were available. I asked if any parent was in a support group and the overall response was no.*

1.3.2. The parent who took her child to the Cleveland Clinic demonstrated concern and acceptance of the child's disability. The parents discussed finding support from other parents. These responses reflect the authoritative parenting style in that they were seeking support to find resources for their child by utilizing a collaborative approach, an essential component of the authoritative style.

1.4. *Would you rather have your child speak their mind or learn to be polite?*

1.4.1. *One parent felt that it was important to for their child to be polite while another stated that it was more important to have respect. The first parent*

felt that she would want her son to politely speak his mind. She felt that she would want him to feel free to express himself.

1.4.2. The first parent's response demonstrates Baumrind's authoritative parenting pattern style. The parent wanted the child to be polite. This demonstrates how the parent controls through acceptable behavior of being polite. The second parent's response demonstrated a permissive parenting pattern suggesting less explicit controls on her child.

1.5. *How do you feel when you have to scold your child?*

1.5.1. *The overall tone for this response was that no parent likes to scold their child. One parent used smiley faces and frowns to get a message of disapproval across to their child. This parent stated that she would use spanking only as a last resort. Another parent said, "We try not to treat … and … (names omitted) any different than you would another child. This parent went on to give an example: "We would tell…..…not to go outside and this child would keep opening the door and going outside. I would give her a whack- whack- whack and two minutes she would go outside because she already lost what you told her a short while ago." This parent felt that scolding and the whack help make it a "more learnable" experience for the child. The parents agreed that the children understand "no."*

1.5.2. Baumrind's distinctive authoritarian parenting style emerges with these parental responses. The parents are making attempts to control the behavior of the child according to traditional standards set by Baumrind. The

authoritarian parenting style stresses obedience to authority and implements punitive measures.

1.6. *At what age should a special needs child be expected to do some chores?*

1.6.1. *The parent participants responded to this question by saying that they as parents were still doing a lot for the child. Two of the parents still needed to bath their child, while another parent said that her daughter wasn't even potty trained at 7 years of age. This parent said, "We look at what she is capable of doing." Another parent said, "It depends on the child, I do no more or no less for my child."*

1.6.2. With this focus group discussion question, Baumrind's (1967) authoritative parenting style is most apparent. These parents have less explicit controls over their child, and the parents feel that children have to learn how to behave through their own experience. These parents weren't pushing their child to perform an expected behavior; instead the parents were allowing their children to be individualistic in nature and accomplish tasks at the children's independent rate.

1.7. *What is your opinion of open conflict between a parent and child?*

1.7.1. *The parent who responded to this question said, "There is really not a lot of conflict in our family." The mother went on to explain that the father does not deal well with frustration. She stated that the father, "just sort of scoots away from it all." The mother said she diverts the children's attention or*

goes onto something else and pretty soon the conflict stops. "I'll ignore the action," she stated.

1.7.2. Baumrind's permissive parenting pattern is the focus with this parent's response. Baumrind stressed that the permissive parent has less control over their child, and that the child needs to learn how to behave through their own experience.

1.8. *What does willful and aggressive behavior in your child represent?*

1.8.1. *The first parent participant stated that it was "frustration" and that she found it difficult to control the impulsive behavior. Another parent said, "Special need children have routines and ruts, and that is where the frustration comes into play." She went on to state that special needs children need that and they function like that. By the word "that" she was referring to the child's frustration. The mother noted that acting out is the way the child handles his frustration. A third parent went on to say that a child will feel like, "now I'm really frustrated, and this is how I am going to take it out." The parent said that this is the "point of no turning back."*

1.8.2. The first parent expressed frustration in dealing with her child's lack of control with the impulsive behavior. The action of the parent attempting to control the child's behavior demonstrated Baumrind's authoritarian parenting pattern by the parent attempting to control the child's behavior. The third parent's response demonstrated permissive behavior because she would let the child get to "point of no return" behavior.

1.9. *How do you foster the behavior you expect from your special needs child?*

1.9.1. *A parent participant stated that she doesn't "really expect anything" from her child. She went on to give an example of a behavior and how she fostered a behavior she wanted to see. She explained how her daughter would throw all the pillows off the sofa on to the floor and then drag them around. The mother would say, "Excuse me missy, you pick that pillow right back up and you do it now." The mother said that now she puts pillows in her daughter's room along with a supply of toys, so now the daughter can go to her room instead of dismantling the living area.*

1.9.2. Again looking at Baumrind's (1967) parenting styles, this parenting response that *she doesn't expect anything* demonstrates permissive parenting. However, her response to how she deals with her daughter when the child threw the pillows is characteristic of the authoritative style where the parent is less likely to use physical punishment as a response to negative behavior and demonstrates understanding of the child's rights.

1.10. *How does a parent develop independence in their child with special needs?*

1.10.1. *The first response came for a parent who said, "Just by doing the things that you do with a regular child." The parent said she would show their child how to "go upstairs and get your teeth brushed." "I would think modeling." This parent participant also stated," These kids are different, they are not really independent, like I said, these kids are different." This*

parent went on to say that she wants "independence in as much as they could do." Another participant agreed but added, "My kids know there are rules. They know what they can do. They know where they can go and where they can not go. Yes, modeling is right."

1.10.2. These statements reflect Baumrind's authoritative parenting pattern, showing that the parents know that they understand more and have more knowledge and skills, but that the child also has rights.

1.11. *How do you deal with your special needs child who is causing a conflict with you?*

1.11.1. *In the focus group discussion the consensus was that it would depend on the circumstances that caused the conflict. One parent went on to discuss an incident that happened at the local Wal-Mart. The parent described a trip where they were looking for Halloween costume. Her child was very determined and no matter what they saw the little boy was focused on one thing for a costume. She said, "There is no changing that focus." When the particular costume couldn't be found the child's behavior escalated into "throwing his shoes off, pulling things off the shelves and screaming at the top of his lungs." She said she took him out to the car and reinforced to her son that he need to remain calm in situations like this. She remained stoic throughout this conflict.*

1.11.2. This parent started out demonstrating Baumrind's authoritative parenting style by trying to reason with the child but when this didn't work the parent

moved from authoritative to Baumrind's authoritarian parenting pattern by stressing obedience to her authority. At this point she discouraged any discussion between herself and her son. The parent attempted to control her son's behavior by not giving a choice. She removed him from the situation without discussion. This is an example where Baumrind's parenting style relates to the child's behavior

Focus Group Week 2:

2. **Determine if there are specific challenges for parents of special needs children in rural setting.**

An overwhelming response to this focus topic was not about the children, but primarily about the system the parents encountered.

2.1. Compared to other parents, what are the demands of parenting your special needs child?

2.1.1. *This question stirred impassioned responses. The parent participants that responded to this stated that they had great difficulty with "Red tape." One parent said, "We need help financially, physically, we need help applying for aides to come to help our children." This parent went on to say that she had applied for several years for an aid to help with her son and it took years. With great emphasis on her next statement, she went on further to say that it wasn't the case that she wanted them, but that she needed the aides for her child. Another parent who has two children with severe needs said, directing the statement to the researcher, "You can walk away from your*

children and know that they are safe, we can't do that with our kids. With our kids we can't do that, they will always be kids with needs."

2.1.2. The responses of these parents demonstrated the frustration often associated with parenting a special needs child. One parent said, "Our issues are with our children and the system. The system does not give us what we need. If we ask for a fence, it takes three years to get a fence. It shouldn't be that way."

2.2. <u>What would you do to curb negative behavior in your special needs child?</u>

2.2.1. *One parent started by describing a behavior her daughter with Down Syndrome exhibits. Her daughter will be self-abusive by hitting herself on the head. The parent went on to say that when this happens she very firmly and sternly says, "Absolutely not!" and will hold her child's hands. Another parent in the participant group said she has to make promises very specific for her autistic son. If she says, "Just a minute" she said that at this young age he is aware of time and will "lose it," if the parent delays and goes beyond the "just a minute" statement.*

2.2.2. The parents were exhibiting traits that stress obedience to authority. The challenges the parents face are appropriate interaction with their special needs child. The parent of the autistic child is demonstrating frustration in dealing the autistic behavior. The parent has come to realize that she can't simply talk to her autistic child like she would to another non-special needs child. Early Intervention services for the child would help lessen the parental frustrations over the behavior. Intervention would help the parent learn

behavior techniques and approaches that would limit frustrations for both the child and the parent.

2.3. <u>What demands do you make on your special needs child?</u>

2.3.1. *The parent participants all stated that they gave their child a job that the child could handle and they expected their child to do their assigned task. Some of the jobs their special need children we expected to do were, putting their dishes in the dishwasher and picking up their toys. The parents stated that they demanded respect and one parent rewarded positive behavior with stickers.*

2.3.2. Assigning jobs and encouraging their child to be responsible is the parents attempt to initiate independence for their child. Support and early intervention services are critical to a special needs child's transitioning into different stages of development. The parent acknowledged the child's task completion with a reward. This rewarding demonstrates the encouragement given to children to become independent by completing assigned tasks. Not all parents are as successful and not all reward programs work.

2.4. <u>How important is it for your special needs child to feel liked by all everybody?</u>

2.4.1. *The Parent participants agreed that the children need to feel included. The parents discussed how they do various activities to include their child like taking their child grocery shopping. One parent says she takes her special*

needs daughter "garage sale-ing" in order to include her in family activities.

2.4.2. These parents exhibited, through their actions, that they understood their child needs to be included in the local community and liked by others in that community. The child is encouraged to explore by going to garage sales and to become familiar with community surroundings (i.e., going to the grocery store. The frustration demonstrated by parents is that they feel isolated. The parents are the only ones who are undertaking this challenge of socializing their special needs child. The parents want to do, "normal" social activities with their child, but their frustration is that they are the only ones who do these activities with their child. Unfortunately, early intervention services are not available to help the parent with socialization activities.

2.5. <u>What emphasis should be placed on obedience by my special needs child?</u>

2.5.1. *One participant spoke up and stated that there was no reason that her son shouldn't be expected to listen. Another parent said that she felt timing was essential for each child to listen and be able to deal with and understand commands. The parents agreed that obedience was important for all children even their children with special needs*

2.5.2. The frustration of the first parent is very evident when she stated that there was no reason her son needed to listen. She was demonstrating frustration at her special needs child and felt because of his special needs that he didn't need to follow certain social and behavioral mores that most children follow

at his age. Early intervention services could help parents lessen their frustrations and help their child learn limitation and boundaries that are appropriate for their developmental level.

2.6. <u>What are your views on early toilet training for your special needs child?</u>

2.6.1. *When this was opened up for discussion one parent immediately said, "Whoa, you pick and choose your battles." The parent participants were in agreement that when the child was ready then that is the time. They didn't have the energy to make it a big deal along with the issues they dealt with day -to-day. Another parent said that she doesn't follow through and just didn't want to deal with the potty training, but when her son was successful she made a big deal of him "wee-weeing" in the potty.*

2.6.2. Toilet training for special needs children doesn't have to be a battle. This area can be very frustrating for these parents, as it can be for all parents. Their child does not follow the norm of child development. Here is where early intervention services can be very helpful in teaching successful techniques for toilet training. Very often early intervention is not available to these parents because of the geographic location. The availability of local and convenient support groups where these topic can be discussed as another frustration and challenge these parents face

2.7. <u>What methods do you use to have your special needs child behave?</u>

2.7.1. *One parent participant restated what she said before. She said that she very firmly says, "Absolutely not." This was her special phrase that she used when disciplining and when she wanted her child to stop certain behaviors. Her child had gotten familiar with the phrase and responded to her. She used this phrase consistently in behavior situations. Another parent said she doesn't give options or choices like she would with her other child. She stated that her special needs child needs to hear and see clear cut statements like, "You have to do this or that."*

2.7.2. Here again early intervention's help with various behavior modification methods could have been instrumental in helping the parent respond to the special needs child's behavior. For example, the parent who used the phrase *"Absolutely not."* could have benefited from a behavioral support intervention that might have offered a behavior plan that was better aligned for this child's behavior issues. The focus group also acted as a support group for these parents. The participants heard how other parents dealt with difficult situations. The need for an accessible support group is critical for these parents.

2.8. <u>What methods do you use to control the actions of your special needs child?</u>

2.8.1. *To control the actions of their special needs child, the parents discussed how they try to re-direct their child's attention to something else. One parent stated that she will offer another toy, while another parent would suggest doing another activity. One parent stated, "Sometimes it works and*

sometimes it doesn't" with the other parent nodding in agreement. Again the parent reiterated that she has success controlling the behavior of her special need child with her statement, "Absolutely not." Her child had grown familiar with this specific command and responded to it appropriately.

2.8.2. Behavior is the challenge for the parents in this focus group question. The frustration is that these parents don't have resources to maintain appropriate behavior. The parents said they try to re-direct their child but that doesn't always work. Through evaluations, special education regulations allow for behavior support in the educational system, but the frustrations with the parents is that it often isn't available through the early intervention system without extensive behavioral evaluations.

2.9. <u>What are your opinions of a parent of a special needs child, working outside of the home?</u>

2.9.1. *One parent said she couldn't work outside the home until she got aids to come in and help with her special needs child. The other parents didn't work outside the home. They stated, "Who would watch our child?" The parents said their day-to-day care of their special needs child is, "…repetition day-to-day …." They stated that even going out to the store without their special needs child is very rare.*

2.9.2. Both parents' ability to work outside the home was met with frustration with the system. These parents had a desire to work outside of the home, but felt they couldn't because they wouldn't leave there child with an unskilled

care provider. Both parents needed skilled care for her child. These parents demonstrated authoritative parenting. The parents felt their child had a right to appropriate care and if there wasn't care then they would stay home and forgo an outside job.

Focus Group Week 3:

3. Determined if any additional responsibilities exist specific to these parents of special needs children in a rural setting.

3.1. What additional parenting issue specific to my child's needs are different than what other parents face?

3.1.1. One parent was quite vocal and appeared passionate about this statement and spoke up immediately. She said, "We have to fight for every single thing, tooth and nail, wait and wait. It's just not right that it takes so much time. We don't get the respect. There is always a condition. We need to spend our money and then get reimbursed and that takes time. One parent said that she sent in for a reimbursement in the early spring of last year and still hasn't gotten reimbursed.

3.1.2. The dedication and responsibilities these parents feel towards their child is very evident by the lengths they go through to fight for services. Most parents are dedicated to the needs of their children, but parents of special needs children feel they have an additional responsibility due to the specific limitations that their child has.

3.2. What additional issues affect my ability to parent effectively because of where I live?

3.2.1. The parents were in agreement when they discussed this issue. They stated that in that the urban areas help and resources are so much more available. Another parent participant stated, "There are fewer people who have the appropriate credentials to work with our special needs children in the rural areas. There are not enough positions in our area to take care of our situation." We call for help and we get the run around and the agencies say to us, "We have to see if you are qualified". "Social Services is lousy. We pay taxes to get help to care for our children but we never see it or it takes such a long time."

3.2.2. As stated in the previous discussion (*3.2.1*), these parents are dedicated to their child and to providing for their specific needs. They believe in, and are fighting for, the rights of their child to a greater extent than that a parent of a non special needs child. These parents of special needs child have to fight to prove the need for governmental regulation, that the services they request are valid and needed for their child. The statement, "We have to see if you are qualified" is the verbal frustration that most parents of special needs feel.

When three focus group sessions were completed the parents were asked if they felt the need to utilize the fourth session. The parents agreed that they felt that there was no need for another session. The parents were thanked for their participation. The researcher had no follow up with the parents after the last session.

Summary of Observation

The focus group opened an avenue of dialogue for these rural parents to voice their concerns. Throughout the length of the study this researcher sensed a feeling of helplessness from the parents when it came to getting help for their child. In addition to the assessment of parenting styles, three areas emerged from the discussions, (a) frustration with service delivery, (b) overcoming personal/family hurdles, and (c) frustration in dealing with bureaucracy. All three of these areas confronted parents as they sought to provide for their special needs child.

Parents made it known that the greatest challenge they faced was the lack of support from the agencies that were in place to help them and their child. This is vividly documented in the focus group discussion questions from week two where parents were asked to determine specific challenges for themselves and their special needs child as well as in discussion questions 3.1 and 3.2. A specific example of this frustration was documented when the parent spoke of a time that she requested a safety fence for her child and it took three years to get the fence that would keep her child safe.

This researcher also noted that feelings of personal isolation were prevalent. This was demonstrated in the topic focus group responses of, 1.31. Additionally, in discussion 1.7.1 one mother gave an example that the family support was not there as she would like it to be She stated that the father “does not deal well with the frustration” of having a high need special needs child.

In 1.2.1 a parent implied tones of mistrust because an apparent misdiagnosis of her child by her doctor. Her unwillingness to discuss this topic seemed to hint at a mistrust of the doctor. This misdiagnosis caused the parent to withdraw from the discussion perhaps because of the misdiagnosis in the past she doesn’t know who to trust.

These focus groups meetings gave the participants the opportunity to be heard and to discuss issues and get support from other parents with similar situation. There are still issues that these parents need to deal with and much more to be done to understand the parenting styles of the parents of special needs children.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Initially, this research was conducted to better determine the styles of parental involvement with children of special needs in rural elementary schools. Parenting styles are categorized according to parenting sensitivity and the degree of demands placed upon the child (Baumrind, 1967). Overall, as the parent participants demonstrated in their responses, there was no particular outstanding or emerging parenting style of Baumrind's (1967).

In week one, the focus group analysis of discussion, 1.1.2, documented that the parents showed a blend of Baumrind's parenting styles of authoritative and permissive. The response of a parent participant in 1.1.2 stated that, "there is no clear cut position on how to raise a child with special needs and she feels that a parent needs to be flexible. This parent's stated opinion falls under Baumrind's (1967) permissive parenting pattern. An example of authoritative parenting style can be found in focus group response *2.2.1* when a parent responded to the focus group topic of; "What would you do to curb negative behavior in your special needs child?" This parent described a self-abusive behavior of her Down syndrome daughter. When this behavior happens, the parent restrains the child's hands and very firmly and sternly says, "Absolutely not." Even though the parent attempted to keep the child from harm this parenting style reflects the authoritarian parenting pattern. However later on in discussion *2.5.2* this parent demonstrated permissive parenting when she said you pick your own battles when it came to views on potty training. She stated that when the child is ready then that is the

time to potty train. Overall, in the analysis of the responses, it could be concluded that no one parenting style emerged as the most frequently utilized style.

Additionally, this research was conducted to ascertain if there were specific challenges for parents of special needs children in rural schools. The focus group responses for *2.1.1*, brought up specific challenges such as the parent who couldn't work outside the home until she got aides to come in and help with her special needs child. As noted in the responses for *3.1.1*, another parent participant discussed frustration when she called for help for her child and got "the run around." She stated that "We have to fight for every single thing tooth and nail, wait, and wait." The participants experienced frustration with government agencies in focus group discussion section *3.2.1*, when these agencies say, "We have to see if you are qualified." The frustration is exacerbated by the fact that they feel they pay taxes just like any other parent and they never get the help or that it takes such a long time to receive support**.**

In addition to (a) the assessment of parenting styles as defined by Baumrind (1967), and (b) the determination of specific challenges facing parents, the focus group brought out the reality that (c) parents of children with special needs do feel they have additional parental responsibility compared to parents of a child without special needs. These additional responsibilities discussed by the participants are due to their challenges when dealing with service delivery, personal and family issues, and frustration with bureaucracy. For example, during focus group question 1.1, parents discussed activities that they use with their children and they also expressed feelings of mistrust. Further on into the discussion in section *1.2.1*, one parent had implied resentment due to an apparent misdiagnosis involving her special needs child. At this point she seemed apprehensive to

discuss the topic further. It appears that because of this misdiagnosis she has trust issues with individuals who say they will help. During the discussion of question 2.1 and response *2.1.1* a parent disclosed that she had requested a home aid for her pre-school child. Her frustration was, caused by the fact that it took several years to get an in-home aid to help her with her severely disabled child. Another parent expressed frustration when she discussed the fact that it took her three years to get a fence to keep her child safe in the yard. The frustration of these parents came out in the discussions. In discussion *3.1.1* one parent was especially passionate about this and stated that "We have to fight for everything…it takes so much time…we don't get respect." Another parent felt frustration when she applied for reimbursement for an expense for her child and still hadn't received it even after many months.

One positive outcome emerging from the focus groups was that these parents were able to talk to other parents who experienced the same frustration. When the frustration was acknowledged there was nodding, tacit agreement each time any one of the parents discussed a particular frustration. Then examples parents stated included reimbursement for an expense that they have to fight for everything, and the difficulty of finding and getting rural services for their child. They were able to share similar stories and lean on each other for support.

Other Considerations:

The parent participants exhibited the same variety of parenting styles as parents with non-special need children. There were those who demonstrated authoritarian parenting pattern by expressing the desire to control their child's behaviors and attitudes. They

stressed obedience and discouraged discussion between themselves and their child. The authoritative parent demonstrated more understanding and knowledge that their child has rights and skills. They placed less emphasis on obedience and more emphasis on reasoning and willingness to see things from a child's point of view. Permissive parenting patterns showed up with parents exhibiting fewer controls on their child. According to Baumrind, (1967) these parents will take less time to discipline their child.

When parents are expecting a child they usually discuss a name, future goals for their child, and choose cute little outfits. However when a child with a disability is born then this "not perfect" baby will influence how the parents will parent in the future. Based on this statement, this researcher feels that children with special needs can influence parenting styles. A child with a disability will have a lasting impact on the style of parenting as noted in focus group discussion, 1.7.1, where the mother stated that the father removes himself from parenting the child with special needs.

Sometimes a parent will have no clue on how to parent a special needs child. This child can either break or make the parent. The child can help the parent focus on how to help, how to be involved, and to learn what they can do better to help their child. This researcher concluded from the focus group discussion that these children became the main focus of the parent - often to the disadvantage of other siblings. This study noted that throughout the three focus group sessions, the parent participants rarely discussed their other children. Since the group discussion focused primarily on special needs children that outcome may have been an inadvertent result. These parents may have interpreted that what I wanted from them, especially given the nature of the questions, was information only about their special needs child. (This format may not have

emphasized what else was important to them.) These participants focused on parenting their special needs child. This special needs child can bring out the best and the worst in the parent. Additionally, how the parents deal with the disability, and their child, will depend on if the parent is told about Early Intervention and other services available to the child and family.

According to Honig (1999), the goal of parents should be to parent successfully. This researcher suggests that as a result of responses from the focus groups, these parents do parent successfully even when perceiving their child's needs differently. Honig (1999) went on to state that the parent who has an open mind about their child's disability will utilize available resources successfully. In focus group discussion *2.1.1,* the parent's decision to become involved in advocating for services (or fences as stated for their child) was beneficial, not only for the child, but also for the parent. These parents demonstrated a range of parenting styles and parented effectively.

Limitations

A major limitation to this study was the low numbers of parent participants. Another limitation was that attendance was not consistent. The parent participants did not attend each session and the parents did not meet with the same parent participant twice. Some participants were not comfortable as others were to contribute to the focus group topic. This made some sessions particularly difficult to collect data due to the lack of the week's flow of the topic discussion. The continuity of thought from week to week was broken and each focus group was like its own individual session, unattached to the previous session. There was no parent who attended two sessions in a row**.** Finally this

researcher would lengthen the sessions to run five or six weeks so this researcher could conduct more in-depth discussion sessions. This would encourage problem solving among the parents and widen their networking and also encourage the parents to take a more active stand and become better advocates for their child.

Conclusion

The parents participants had similar expectations as the parents do who have children with no special needs, but these parents had expectations based on their child's special needs. The responses from the focus groups highlighted the unique characteristics of each parent and the parenting style they exhibited. This study saw that not one parent exclusively demonstrated any one particular parenting style but rather exhibited a combination of all Baumrind's parenting styles. This study noted that according to Fiene and Taylor (1991) the mother is often involved the most. For example, no fathers participated and one participant stated in focus group 1.7.1, that she is the primary care giver and that the father distanced himself after the special needs child was born. This father didn't deal well with the frustrations stemming from parenting situations and will not respond to parenting issues with his special needs child. All participants were the mothers of these children with special needs. They were the parent who was involved with their children.

Baumrind's (1967) model of parenting styles has been well supported and established with evidence based research. Baumrind (1967) has led the way in understanding parents and how they parent. She has established an appreciation of the value of parenting. This study collected data from parents who already expressed interest

in their child and were willing participants. These willing responders contributed without reservations or forethought.

In future research, using Baumrind's parenting framework, this researcher would need to include parents who would not necessarily volunteer to be a responder. Perhaps to draw more parents an enticement such as a monitory reward, or some other type of compensation for participation could be utilized.

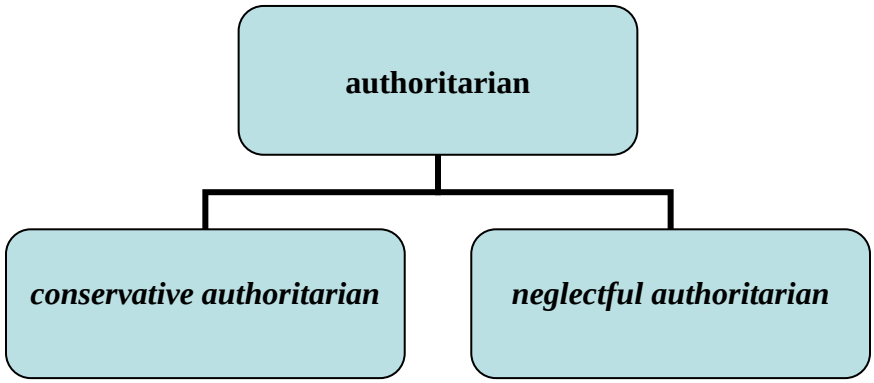
Using Baumrind's parenting framework another possible source of data collection that could be implemented is posting survey questions on an online web page dedicated to parents of special needs children. The researcher could develop a web site and parent participants could fill out the online discussion questions. The researcher could also open an online blog where parents of special needs children could respond to each other with the focus group questions. The limitations of this approach that could affect validity is that the researcher does not know the demographics of the responders, or if the responders are actually parents of special needs children. This might be a good source of data if the criterion for the data collection was broadened to include any parent of a special needs child. Also, any individual who has an interest in the special needs child parenting topic matter might find the data useful.

Parenting Styles Sub Categories

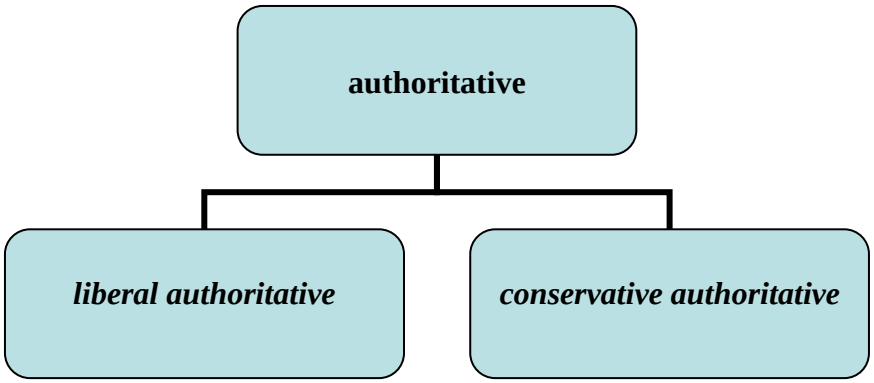
In dealing with parents for over twenty years, this researcher has seen parents who do not fit within the specific framework of Baumrind's (1967) four parenting styles. The present study expands Baumrind's theory, suggesting there maybe (a) sub-categories

within the four parenting styles, or (b) blends of two or more primary parenting styles that could be established. In answering focus group topic week 1, section *1.1.2*, of the topic question, "What is your clear cut position on how to raise children with special needs? One parent stated that there is "no clear cut tailored thing." In this part of her parenting statement the style that is exhibited is permissive. The parent goes on to say that she "goes with what works" and she felt she "needed to be flexible." This segment of her statement shows Baumrind's authoritative parenting pattern. This example of a parenting style blend supports both Baumrind's authoritative parenting and permissive parenting.

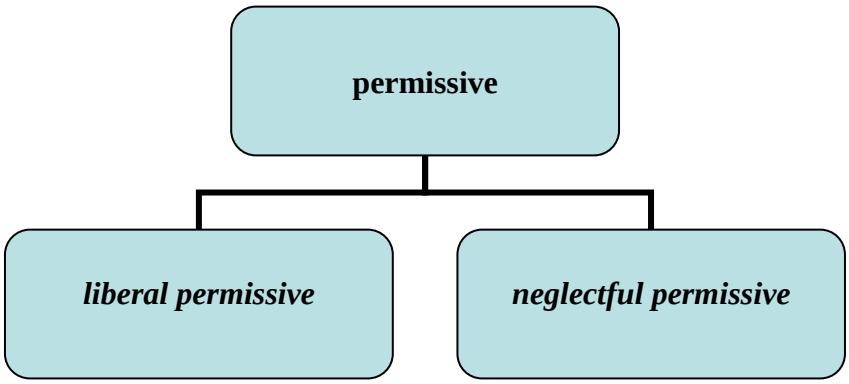
Authoritarian parents will control their child's behavior by insisting on strict obedience to their will. This parenting style will not tolerate discussion that differs from their opinion and they will use physical punishment to enforce their authority. When a parent is focused so much on total control but does not interact with the child on a regular basis, this parent exhibits traits of the uninvolved parent. Depending on the level on noninvolvement, the sub-categories may range from conservative authoritarian to neglectful authoritarian. A conservative authoritarian sub-category may exhibit total controls on the child, but will relax the controls only when it is in the interest of the parent. A neglectful authoritarian parent will exhibit parenting patterns of total control on the child, but is unconcerned and does not interact with the child to the point of attaining neglectful parental behavior status. The parent has the attitude of "it's my way or nothing."



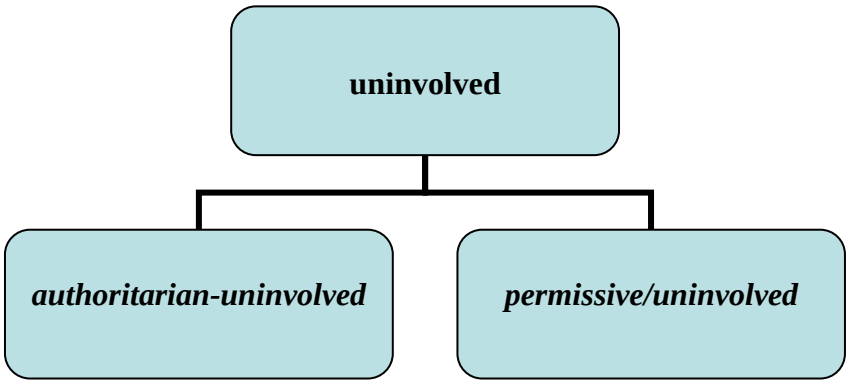
Parents that fall into the authoritative category have characteristics of parenting where they believe their children have rights. They are less likely to use physical punishment, and they will take the time to explain rules, decisions and reasoning. These parents are willing to accept the child's point of view, even if the parent does not agree. The parents encourage their child to be individualistic and independent. But if these parenting styles are allowed to become lax, the authoritative parenting can reflect permissive characteristics and become more liberal thus evolving into a liberal authoritative parent. An authoritative parent who exhibits a more rigid parenting structure such as obedience to parental demands that begins to lean towards the authoritarian parenting styles is the conservative authoritative parent.



The permissive parent is less likely to have explicit control on their child. This parent believes that the child has to learn how to behave through their own experience and there is a low level of discipline. A permissive parent who lets parental controls get very lax and has a discipline style that is nonexistent may be classified as a liberal permissive. The parent who demonstrates little or no control is demonstrating neglectful permissiveness.



The uninvolved parent is not involved with her child but can show characteristics of an authoritarian parent. Here the uninvolved parent shows all the characteristics of ultimate control but is not involved with the child unless the child breaks the rules. The uninvolved parent with permissive parenting tendencies will have less explicit controls on her child along with the uninvolved parenting characteristic such as not being involved with the child. This is the parent who let children learn how to behave through the child's own experience and consequences, without any parental guidance or input.



Baumrind (1967) laid the foundation and basis to understanding parenting styles. As stated in the parenting sub-categories and blends, the results here show that parenting styles can change as they are influenced by personal values and beliefs, situational context, and family life environments. These variables may be compounded for families living in rural areas. Understanding these variables may lead to a more effective understanding of how to develop efficient strategies that can successfully assist parents as they cultivate their parenting styles.

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Appendix A

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE:	Parental involvement with special needs children in a rural school district.
INVESTIGATOR:	Mary E. Lenda, 43 East Chautauqua St., Mayville, NY 14757, 716-753-3762
ADVISOR:	Dr. Phil Belfiore Mercyhurst College, Education Department 814-824-2267
SOURCE OF SUPPORT:	This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at Duquesne University.
PURPOSE:	You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate parental involvement with special needs children in a rural school setting through focus group discussions. There will be four focus groups with each lasting about an hour. The focus groups will be audio taped and transcribed. These are the only requests that will be made of you.
RISKS AND BENEFITS:	There will be minimal risk in participating in this focus group.
COMPENSATION:	There will be no compensation in any way in the participation of this project. However, participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.
CONFIDENTIALITY:	All information will be kept secret and the audio tapes will be kept in a locked file which only the

researcher will have access to. Your name will never appear on any survey or in this research. Your response(s) will only appear in statistical data summaries. Transcription of tapes will delete all identifiers of subjects as well as any one discussed during the sessions. Audio tapes recorded data will be held in a locked lockbox in the researcher's office and destroyed immediately after transcription. Quotes may be selected from the written transcriptions and used in the written research project.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW: You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Mary E. Lenda, researcher at (716-753-3762); or Dr. Phil Belfiore, researcher advisor (814-824-2267), or Dr. Paul Richer, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412-396-6326).

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

Appendix B

Focus Group Topic Agenda

Focus Group Weekly Discussion

Focus Group Topic Agenda:

Focus Group Week 1:

2. Types of parental involvement with children of special needs, in a rural setting.
    2.1. What is your clear cut position on how to raise children with special needs?
    2.2. What generalizations about rearing children with special needs do most families hold?
    2.3. What is a good idea for parents to use in handling their special needs children?
    2.4. Would you rather have your child speak their mind or learn to be polite? Why?
    2.5. How do you feel when you have to scold my child?
    2.6. At what age should a special needs child be expected to do some chores?
    2.7. What is your opinion of open conflict between a parent and child?
    2.8. What does willful and aggressive behavior in your child represent?
    2.9. How do you foster the behavior you expect from your special needs child?
    2.10. How does a parent develop independence in their child with special needs?
    2.11. How do you deal with your special needs child who is causing a conflict with you?

Focus Group Week 2:

3. Determine if there are specific challenges for parents of special needs children in rural setting.
    3.1. Compared to other parents, what are the demands of parenting your special needs child?
    3.2. What would you do to curb negative behavior in your special needs child?

3.3. What demands do you make on your special needs child?

3.4. How important is it for your special needs child to feel liked by all everybody?

3.5. What emphasis should be placed on obedience by my special needs child?

3.6. What are your views on early toilet training for your special needs child?

3.7. What methods do you use to have your special needs child behave?

3.8. What methods do you use to control the actions of your special needs child?

3.9. What are your opinions of a parent of a special needs child, working outside of the home?

Focus Group Week 3:

3. Determine if any additional responsibilities exist specific to these parents of special needs children in a rural setting.

Additional focus group topic questions can be added at this point if needed.

1. What additional parenting issues, specific to my special child's needs, are different than what other parents face?
2. What additional issues affect my ability to parent effectively because of where I live?

Appendix C

Public notice for posting in local newspaper

Call for participants

To be posted in the Post Journal, The Westfield Republican and the Mayville Sentinel

Public Notice:
Parents and Caregivers
I need your 2¢

Parents and care givers are invited to a discussion group on parenting special needs children. This public focus group meeting is part of a research project in Chautauqua County to research parenting special needs children and to discuss the parenting styles of parents who have developmentally and special needs children. These discussion groups will be held at Chautauqua Lake Central, Sherman Central, Panama Central, Westfield Academy and Ripley Central in Chautauqua County. The meetings will be from 6:00pm to 7:00pm. Dates in September and October will be announced. The purpose of the meeting is to explore the following research questions:

4. In reference to Baumrind's theory (1967) what are the styles of parental involvement with children of special needs in rural elementary schools?
5. Are there specific challenges for parents of special needs children in rural schools? These challenges can be defined as the difficulty in finding appropriate services specific to the needs of their child.
6. Are there additional responsibilities parents of special needs children face as a result of living in a rural area? Responsibilities that parents face can be defined as providing and allowing appropriate care within the guidelines of IDEA.

Come and take part in a very important local research study. A light snack and refreshments will be provided. Please call 716-753-3762 or email littlemmm@hotmail.com for more information