

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**SECONDARY SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS
WITH DISABILITIES:**

**Strengthening Collaborative Partnerships
Between Home and School**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Education
in
Special Education**

**at Massey University, Palmerston North,
Aotearoa/New Zealand**

Robin Jane Wills

2005

ABSTRACT

Experiences of secondary school, for parents whose children have a disability, are often vastly different from those of other parents. This study examined the culture and practices of one secondary school in order to describe how relationships with these parents are created and maintained, how well they work for parents and how their experiences could be enhanced.

A single case study approach, situated within the complex home-school ecological context, was employed. The perspectives of 24 parents, 23 students and five special education teachers were obtained through semi-formal interviews. In addition sixteen IEP meetings were observed and 13 student home-school diaries were analysed as were the IEP documents from 24 previous IEP meetings and various other of the school's documents, such as its relevant policies and correspondence with the Ministry of Education. The data were analysed employing a matrix style theoretical model, which clustered identified themes into three powerful spheres of influence: school climate, school systems and personal relationships.

The levels of satisfaction with school culture and practices were found to be very high for all participant groups in this study. They were particularly positive about the strong individual relationships they had been formed. However, the degree of active, equitable participation in many school activities was influenced not only by factors within the school, but by educational policy and practice and by society at large. There were a significant number of barriers identified in each of these areas, which limited participation for each group. Improved systems for communication, greater flexibility regarding IEP format and higher levels of inclusion were among the improvements sought by parents and teachers. Potential improvements in each of the nine clusters of themes represented in the matrix were identified as ways to achieve a more equitable role for these parents and their teenagers.

The study suggests that describing home-school relationships utilising the matrix provides a particularly suitable platform for identifying, maintaining and celebrating positive practices, while revealing, acknowledging and acting on those areas that are shown to need development, both within IEP practices and across the school community.

DEDICATION

For Waimarie Marshall (1987 - 2004) who remains an inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To all the people who assisted with this thesis, my grateful thanks. Most significantly I am indebted to the parents, teachers and students who provided encouragement and practical support along with their many thought-provoking responses and suggestions regarding their home-school interactions.

I acknowledge the Massey University Human Ethics Committee for approving this research, the host school which provided the all important access and assistance needed to complete the work, and the Ministry of Education for granting me study leave for a period of six months during the research a period.

My sincere appreciation goes to my ever positive supervisors, Jill Bevan-Brown and Janis Carroll-Lind Massey for their thorough and stimulating approach to the study. Finally, my immense love and gratitude goes to my family for their tireless support, understanding and patience.

FOREWORD

Stake (1995) asserts that in qualitative research, “phenomena need accurate description, but even observational interpretation of those phenomena will be shaped by the mood, the experience, the intention of the researcher” (p.95). Rather than deny the importance of these fundamental dimensions, the following description makes clear my underlying perspective and relationship to the setting (see also Ch.3).

Beginning my career as a speech therapist (now speech-language therapist) in the 1970s ensured my roots were in a positivist world; practice involved locating problems within each child. Yet, students always attended clinics accompanied by family members; understanding and accommodating differences between families came with the territory. A shift into special education teaching in the 1980s brought awareness that the potential for parents and families to contribute to their child’s education was often underestimated, although many attempts had been made to blame them for their children’s disabilities.

There are two further influences at play in my analysis of the current case, which encourage my leaning towards the perspectives presented. Firstly, I honour my connection to my tīpuna (my ancestors) and their connection to the land. In this way I acknowledge the transmission of culture and values and insist the way forward in education is not to deny these traditional views (and the imperative of parents to transmit values, principles and practices: culture), but to honour lessons from the past. Secondly, I live myself with permanent disability resulting from a motor vehicle accident. I have had pause to reflect on the nature of disability and its social/medical construction. In my rehabilitation, I have drawn heavily from many quarters, including medical, psycho-medical, social, emotional and spiritual support and from people who represent vastly differing perspectives to ability and well-being.

I believe there is, as yet, no clear direction for home-school partnerships in special education or inclusive education; new, just and emancipating processes must be adopted without destroying those things we cherish (or at least have found functional) from the past. It is unlikely one model or theory will be found to fit all families; there is such a wealth of diversity to celebrate and some things are bigger, less clear, or operate in different dimensions from those about which we theorise in special education.

CONTENTS

Title	i
Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iii
Foreword	iv
Contents	v
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background to Partnerships	1
1.2 Purpose of the Study	2
1.3 The Research Domain	3
1.4 Research Rationale	5
1.5 Research Focus	6
1.6 Introduction to the Methodology	6
1.7 The Role of the Researcher	7
1.8 Significance of the Study	7
1.8.1 Relationship to Theory	7
1.8.2 Relationship to Research	7
1.8.3 Relationship to Practice	8
1.9 Organisation of the Report	9
1.10 Chapter Summary	10
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	11
2.1 Involvement, Collaboration, Partnership	12
2.2 Parents / Families in Schools: Some History	13
2.2.1 Levels and Types of Involvement and Partnerships	14
2.2.2 The IEP Partnership	15
2.3 Benefits of Parental / Family / Whanau Involvement in Schools	17
2.3.1 The IEP	17
2.4 Promoting Collaborative Partnerships	18

2.4.1	Family Systems	19
2.4.2	Partnership Services and Support Groups	20
2.4.3	The Role of the Principal and School Policy	20
2.4.4	Communication	22
2.4.5	The Role of the Student	23
2.5	Barriers to Effective Collaborative Partnerships with Parents	24
2.6	Disadvantages and Problems with Collaborative IEP Partnerships	26
2.7	Inclusion	28
2.7.1	Collaboration with General Educators	30
2.8	Transition	31
2.9	Teacher Education	32
2.10	Chapter Summary	33
3	METHODOLOGY	35
3.1	Introduction	35
3.2	Research Design Framework	35
3.2.1	The Positivist Paradigm	35
3.2.2	The Interpretivist Paradigm	36
3.2.3	Coalesced Paradigms – Implications for this Research	36
3.3	Case Study Rationale	40
3.3.1	Relationship to the Eclectic Model	40
3.3.2	Why a Case Study Approach?	40
3.3.3	Case Study and the Role of Theory	41
3.4	The Setting	43
3.4.1	The Researcher’s Role	44
3.4.2	The Participants	45
3.5	Methods: Data Collection	47
3.5.1	Document Analysis	47
3.5.2	Semi-Structured Interviews	48
3.5.3	Direct Observation	49
3.5.4	Memos	50
3.6	Data Analysis	51
3.6.1	Database	51
3.6.2	Criteria	51

3.6.3	Reflection	52
3.6.4	Process	52
3.7	Validity and Reliability	53
3.7.1	Internal Validity	53
3.7.2	Construct Validity	54
3.7.3	External Validity	54
3.7.4	Reliability	55
3.8	Ethical Considerations	55
3.9	Chapter Summary	57
4	FINDINGS	59
4.1	Introduction	59
4.2	The Relationship Matrix	60
4.3	Overall Positive and Negative Perceptions	61
4.3.1	Positive Perceptions: The Power of Goodwill	61
4.3.2	A Negative to Balance Every Positive	62
4.4	Themes	63
4.4.1	Opportunities / Missed Chances	63
4.4.1.1	Thematic Clusters: Opportunities	63
	<i>[a] Opportunities and Climate</i>	63
	<i>[b] Opportunities and Systems</i>	69
	<i>[c] Opportunities and Relationships</i>	91
4.4.2	Supports / Barriers	94
4.4.2.1	Thematic Clusters: Supports	95
	<i>[d] Supports and Climate</i>	95
	<i>[e] Supports and Systems</i>	99
	<i>[f] Supports and /Relationships</i>	105
4.4.3	Communication / Missed Messages	110
4.4.3.1	Thematic Clusters: Communication	111
	<i>[g] Communication and Climate</i>	111
	<i>[h] Communication and Systems</i>	118
	<i>[i] Communication and Relationships</i>	126
4.5	Chapter Summary	134

5	DISCUSSION	135
5.1	Introduction	135
5.2	The Relationship Matrix	135
5.3	Overall Positive and Negative Perceptions	136
5.4	Spheres of Influence	137
5.4.1	School Climate	137
	<i>[a] Opportunities and Climate</i>	137
	<i>[d] Supports and Climate</i>	140
	<i>[g] Communication and Climate</i>	141
5.4.2	School Systems	144
	<i>[b] Opportunities and Systems</i>	144
	<i>[e] Supports and Systems</i>	153
	<i>[h] Communication and Systems</i>	155
5.4.3	Relationships	158
	<i>[c] Opportunities and Relationships</i>	158
	<i>[f] Supports and Relationships</i>	160
	<i>[i] Communication and Relationships</i>	163
5.5	Chapter Conclusion	166
6	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	167
6.1	Introduction	167
6.2	Evaluation of the Research	168
	6.2.1 Delimitations and Limitations	168
	6.2.2 Contributions of the Study	170
6.3	The Relationship Matrix: Spheres of Influence	171
6.4	Recommendations	171
	6.4.1 Climate	171
	6.4.2 School Systems	173
	6.4.3 Relationships	177
6.5	Report Conclusion	179
	Glossary	181
	References	183

Appendices	201
Appendix A: School Policies	201
Appendix B: List of pseudonyms for participant groups	207
Appendix C: Interview Plans	209
Appendix D: Consent Documents	219
Appendix E: Observation Documents	229
Appendix F: Sample Memos	233
Appendix G: Interview Analysis Summary	235
Appendix H: Data Analysis Codes	237

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Overall Participation	45
Table 2	Participation in Data Collection Procedures	45
Table 3	Attendance at Previous IEP Meetings	72
Table 4	Special Education and Wider Community Attendance at Previous IEP Meetings	73
Table 5	Written Reports Provided for Meetings	73
Table 6	Documented Parent Involvement in IEP Evaluation	75
Table 7	Documented Parent involvement in implementation of IEP objectives	75
Table 8	General Parent Involvement in IEP Implementation	76
Table 9	Home-School Diaries: School Entries	76
Table 10	Home-School Diaries: Home Entries	77
Table 11	IEP Observation: Student Participation at IEP Meetings	88
Table 12	IEP Observation: Parent Participation at IEP Meetings	113

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	An Eclectic Action-Based Project Model	38
Figure 2	Model of home-school relationships / IEP partnerships	39
Figure 3	Home-school relationships in ecological context -After Bronfenbrenner	41
Figure 4	Detailed Home-School Relationships in Ecological Context	42
Figure 5	Relationship Matrix: a model of home-school relationships / IEP partnerships	60
Figure 6	Thematic Cluster [a]: Opportunities & Climate	63
Figure 7	Thematic Cluster [b]: Opportunities & Systems	69
Figure 8	Thematic Cluster [c]: Opportunities & Relationships	91
Figure 9	Thematic Cluster [d]: Supports & Climate	95
Figure 10	Thematic Cluster [e]: Supports & Systems	99
Figure 11	Thematic Cluster [f]: Supports & Relationships	105
Figure 12	Thematic Cluster [g]: Communication & Climate	111
Figure 13	Thematic Cluster [h]: Communication & Systems	118
Figure 14	Thematic Cluster [i]: Communication & Relationships	127
Figure 15	Sphere of Influence: School Climate	137
Figure 16	Sphere of Influence: School Systems	144
Figure 17	Sphere of Influence: Relationships	158
Figure 18	Climate: Sphere of Influence	171
Figure 19	Systems: Sphere of Influence	173
Figure 20	Relationships: Sphere of Influence	177