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**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**

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Aotearoa/New Zealand**

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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.

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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.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Aotearoa/New Zealand as a nation has had a rocky road to understanding partnership, as evidenced by our inequitable implementation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi (Orange, 1989). That we are coming to understand the notion of working together to achieve an equitable partnership is a hopeful sign (King, 2003). The Treaty can now be viewed as a founding document of partnership which reminds us all of the need to collaboratively share decision-making power in a spirit of justice and equity (Fraser, 2000).

1.1 BACKGROUND TO PARTNERSHIPS

Equitable partnerships between home and school are fundamental in serving the learning needs of students in all aspects of their development (Epstein, 2001, cited in Diffily, 2003) and especially in managing the complex needs of students with disabilities (Berger, 2000). Home-school partnerships are built on professional accountability to parents and include “mutual respect, sharing in a common purpose, joint decision-making, shared feelings and flexibility in dealing with each other” (Lipsky, 1989, p.173); essential information needs to be shared among everyone concerned with the child’s development.

Most countries similar to Aotearoa/New Zealand have guidelines for partnerships in special education, which are legally mandated in USA (Hamill & Everington, 2002) and Britain (Chasty & Friel, 1993; Russell, 2002). Through the Ministry of Education (MOE), our government provides guidelines and uses various funding mechanisms, for example, the ‘ongoing reviewable resourcing scheme’ (ORRS) to gain compliance (MOE, 1993, 1994, 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004a, 2004b; O’Brien & Ryba, 2005). Special Education 2000 (SE2000) is the framework of government policy for special education provisions (MOE, 1996). There are several provisions within SE2000 designed to reach different sections of the special needs population from birth to early adulthood. The ORRS scheme is a nationally verified mechanism for individually resourcing the low-incidence of young people with high and very high learning needs (Mitchell, 2000; O’Brien & Ryba, 2005). The MOE manages the funds for around half of these students. School fundholding accounts for the remaining half of ORRS students (MOE, 2000, cited in Massey University, 2002). These larger schools, such as

the school in this study (Midland High) and school clusters manage funds for their own students. They are referred to as 'fundholder' schools (Wylie, 2000).

In this country, Australia, Canada, the USA and Britain (where the process is historically called 'statementing'), the Individual Education Plan (IEP) is the central mechanism for determining services, therapies and educational programmes for students with special education needs, although this may be changing in Canada (Andrews, 1996) and some states of Australia (Ashman & Elkins, 2002). Collaboration with and accountability to parents is a central principle of the IEP process (Moltzen, 2005).

To work effectively on IEP processes implies the existence of fully functioning, equitable home-school partnerships. This implication is clear in MOE guidelines and published opinion (Fraser, 2000, 2005; MOE, 1996, 1998b; Moltzen, 2005; Rock, 2000; Russell, 2002). All participants, therefore, need to be availed of equal opportunities and supports to ensure that sound partnering occurs (Diffily, 2003; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000). It follows also that parents need to be in possession of adequate information on which to base their discussion and decision-making. An important vehicle to achieve these aims is unimpeded communication (Berger, 2000; Bos & Vaughn, 1998; Diffily, 2003; Friend & Cook, 2003; Idol, Nevin & Paolucci-Whitcomb, 2000; Hildebrand, Phenice, Gray, & Hines, 2000; Salend, 1998). Unfortunately, according to Fraser (2000), "mutually respectful relationships do not typify many parents' experiences with institutions and professionals" (p.101).

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to identify important features of home-school relationships, particularly IEP partnerships, for families with special education students. Alongside observations and document analysis, the perspectives of those most closely involved, the parents, special education teachers and the students themselves, will be sought, in order to describe how these relationships are established, maintained and modified over time. Importantly, the study endeavours to recognise how interpretations are situated in time, place and personal experience, amongst the clashes and tensions of special education generally in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The project is driven by a desire to generate positive action. To this end, there is a strong motivation to identify 'good practice' as well as areas where the school could strengthen its partnership processes to improve both partnerships with families/whānau and learning outcomes for students with disabilities, as the students move through secondary school and out into adult life.

1.3 THE RESEARCH DOMAIN: Unresolved Issues and Research Problems

Although effective partnerships are central to IEPs, the actual involvement of parents may not be all that high; Thomson and Rowan (1996) found that only 55% of New Zealand parents actually attend their child's IEP meetings. Several factors, including unwelcoming attitudes and limited student involvement, were identified as limitations to their participation, leading Thomson and Rowan to ask whether IEPs need to be re-conceptualised (see also, Peters, 2003). Further complicating parental involvement at high school is the expectation of an increasingly independent teenager. Parents want to move through the normal life-cycle of families and maintain a balanced life-style (Reilly, 2003), but must also accommodate the additional needs of their child with a disability, and frequently deal with persistent aspects of grief, stress or guilt (Berger, 2000; Fraser, 2000; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001, cited in Friend & Cook, 2003), such as described by Kubler-Ross (1977).

With increased barriers at high school level such as increased academic demand and greater content orientation (Wylie, 2000), frequent change throughout the day (Buswell, 1999) and greater student self-consciousness (Lovey, 2002) it is likely that unique problems exist for parents at this level and the need for in-depth understanding could be even greater than indicated by the general literature. However, the most significant research into SE2000 and its provisions to date (Massey University, 2002) combined data from primary and high schools, submerging the unique demands of high schools and Wylie (2000) made scant mention of 'fundholder' schools and even less of these schools in the secondary sector in her influential review of SE2000.

As education, along with all social sciences, embraces post-modernism (Pring, 2000), paradigm clashes in the theoretical underpinnings of special education have become apparent (Mitchell, 2000; Moore et al., 1999; O'Brien & Ryba, 2005; Paul & Cranston-Gingras, 2002; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002). First, there is the clash between the psychometric ('how many') model based in the positivist tradition of modernism and the educational/constructivist ('how well') models of implementation positioned in the ecological/interpretivist tradition of post-modernism (Davies & Prangnell, 1999; Gipps, 1994; Mitchell, 2000; Pring, 2000; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002). For example, MOE guidelines (1998b) anticipate that the IEP document will relate specifically to a few 'measurable' objectives, which focus on changes within the child. Conversely, an ecological model, the model paradoxically favoured by the MOE in its various publications (1993, 1994, 1998a, 1998b), would also identify ways to improve the school environment to account for much greater student diversity. It would also deal with the broader,

longer term and 'more meaningful' aspects of the students' and parents' experiences (Eisner, 2003; McLachlan & Warren, 1995, cited in Huefner, 2000;).

A second clash results from the tension between 'special' and 'inclusive' educational practices, (Stangvik, 1998) which is exacerbated in a society dominated by majority rather than consensus views (Harry, 1992; Paul, French & Cranston-Gingras, 2002) and individualistic new right ideology (Olssen, Codd & O'Neill, 2004). Students with disabilities are marginalised and constituted as 'other' within these discourses. Their need for inclusion can remain largely 'invisible' in New Zealand secondary schools (Hulston, 2000). Further, funding for students with disabilities remains dependent on adherence to the separateness and individualisation of the IEP and to some extent labelling and categorisation (Paul & Cranston-Gingras, 2002) and audits focus on services targeting individuals. This makes a shift towards the more inclusive, non-categorical model of practice promoted, albeit with equivocation (Hulston, 2000), in various MOE publications (1993, 1994, 1998a, 1998b) difficult. Moore et al. (1999) have described this problem as being "caught between two different stories" (p.42). Somewhere in the midst are the "real life efforts of both parents and professionals" (Harry, 1992, p.114); an observation echoed by Menlove, Hudson, & Suter (2001).

The IEP itself, as it is practised in Aotearoa/New Zealand, illustrates this clash of paradigms, both within its structure and alongside other government policy. As mentioned above, the model of assessment and service delivery fits the positivist paradigm with its medical model; in order to secure funding, it focuses on a deficit model of disability situated within the individual child and the rectification of those needs through individual interventions (see Paul & Cranston-Gingras, 2002, and Reschly, 1995). However, because of its team approach, representing *opinion* across a range of the students environments, the IEP also crosses over into a more interpretative paradigm, towards a more social, holistic view of student needs, where 'needs' must be viewed as more than just a set of technical hurdles (Ainscow, 1998).

Alongside this eclectic IEP model, with its elements of positivism and interpretivism, another government policy document, the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (MOE, 1993), states public education is to be inclusive of all students and cater for diversity and is based on an constructivist/ecological, interpretivist model of practice. Davies and Prangnell, (1999), and Mitchell (2000) would argue that these provisions demonstrate an ambiguity in government policy. Such ambiguity is likely to cause issues for those attempting implementation and may account for some of the wide variations in interpretation of policy amongst schools noted by Wylie (2000, 2002).

The IEP process also suffers from resourcing tensions; central versus local control over resources remains a debated issue (O'Brien & Ryba, 2005). Wylie (2000) recommended eliminating the category of 'fundholder' schools in order to improve accountability and increase central control, even though she did not survey or report on the efficacy of these schools. Nevertheless, following Wylie's recommendations, the MOE is currently working to strengthen centralisation of funding, accountability and decision-making (District Manager, personal communication, May 21, 2004; Manager Eligibility, personal communication, September 4, 2003; Group Manager, Special Education, personal communication, October 30, 2003; Wylie, 2002). This trend needs to be reconciled with the growing awareness that plurality, diversity and even uncertainty must be acknowledged and accommodated. Post-modern theory would argue that it might not be possible to maintain a centralised structure which will work for all individual schools, parents and students. Reinforcing this point, Massey University (2002) reported that for around half of parents, schools were the preferred fundholder. Sailor (2002) also advocates the converse approach to Wylie, promoting the idea of site-based management of resources based on the principles of participatory democracy. In another example of ambiguity, the MOE also promotes this philosophy in one of its handbooks (MOE, 1998a).

1.4 RESEARCH RATIONALE

The subject of this research, Midland High School, has special education/learning support policies which assure its community "that the partnership with parents/caregivers and whānau is respected and encouraged" (see Appendix A for school policies). This is as it should be according to the many writers on this subject, including Berger (2000), Coil (2004), Epstein (1996), Epstein and Sanders (1998), Friend and Cook (2003) and Salend (1998). Just what constitutes equitable partnership and how it is to be achieved at high school level for parents and whānau of students with disabilities is less clear. Further, despite the tensions inherent in the model, IEPs maintain a central position in the funding and provision of services for special education students. Because of the huge investment in government resources that this commitment entails, it is unlikely that the model will change dramatically anytime soon. Nor are the paradigm ambiguities likely to be clarified or resolved in the near future. So, it is important to achieve maximum benefits for students and families within the existing structures. This study will therefore properly focus on the IEP and partnership processes as they are practised now. It will also present alternatives and enhancements suggested by the participants and the research literature as having the potential to reconcile home-school partnerships with changing expectations and paradigm clashes, as both the education system and society in general come to terms with increasing inclusion and student diversity (Hamill & Everington,

2002; Lipsky, 1989; Lovey, 2002; Ryba & Annan, 2005). The research will seek to clarify perceptions of wider educational relationships, while focusing on specific issues in enough empirical depth and detail to reveal achievable improvements.

1.5 RESEARCH FOCUS

The central question in this study is: *How do home-school relationships and IEP partnerships work in secondary schools for students with disabilities and their families?* The following sub-questions served to initiate and focus the study:

- How does this school develop and maintain general relationships with parents/ families/ whānau of ORRS funded students?
- How are partnerships established, developed and maintained within the IEP process, and how are these partnerships perceived by parents, teachers and students?
- How do these partnerships change during the various stages of the IEP process; over the period of a particular IEP and over the course of the students' high school life?
- What aspects of IEP and general school interactions do the participants value and wish to retain? What aspects would they like to discard or change?
- In what ways might changes realistically be made to improve general relationships and specific partnership processes?

1.6 INTRODUCTION TO THE METHODOLOGY

In contrast to the Thomson and Rowan (1996, described in 1.8.2) study, this study utilised a case study design and investigated IEP partnerships in only one type of institution. This approach has the potential to develop understanding in greater depth as well as to identify specific paths to improvement in this setting (Creswell, 1998).

The methods used were both qualitative and quantitative and the model is eclectic, incorporating elements of both positivist and interpretivist paradigms. The rationale provided in chapter three relates to the belief that pragmatic solutions must be found to the issues raised (e.g. Ainscow, 1998; Paul, French et al., 2002; Schon, 1987), rather than adhering to a particular paradigm which may limit understandings and thereby cloud possible solutions. The frame of reference is ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hildebrand et al., 2000; Quinn & Ryba, 2000; Sontag, 1996; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002), acknowledging the fundamental importance of environment and

broader relationships to successful partnerships. The symbolic interactionist perspective as coined by Blumer (Berg, 2004, see chapter three) underpins the interpretations of the study. Because this theory aligns the study closely with reality as defined by the participants, the study has the strong potential to increase understanding and improve actual practice to the advantage of young people with disabilities.

1.7 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

Midland is the high school where I work as head of department: special education. During the study I was on leave from the school, which assisted with my ability to stand-back and adopt more of a 'birds-eye' view of the case, although there will no doubt be 'blind spots.' I have accepted the challenge of Lewis (1998) and relinquished my investment in being *rigorously disinterested* to attempt *rigour in an interested manner*. By referring to the foreword and the relevant sections of chapter three, the reader can forge their own subjective conclusions about the research and how it is influenced by my personal professional involvement (McWilliam, 2000).

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.8.1 Relationship to Theory

This paper contributes a fresh model (Figs.1 & 2) for listening to many messages and so promoting *action* in new and advantageous ways. It illustrates a unique attempt to link the perspectives and experiences of a group of parents, teachers and students currently engaged in IEP processes at one secondary school with those of others in the field and with ongoing philosophical and theoretical discussions.

1.8.2 Relationship to Research

The IEP is the foundation of much of what happens in special education. Without an IEP process that lives up to its ideals of collaborative partnership its true potential for benefiting students and families in all their endeavours is unlikely to be realised. However, while there is a wealth of scholarly opinion on the appropriateness and efficacy of IEP processes (e.g. Berger, 2000; Fish & Evans, 1995; Huefner, 2000; Moltzen, 2005; Quinn & Ryba, 2000) there is very little research into how IEPs actually function in this country, and even less into IEP partnerships at a secondary level.

One key New Zealand study (Thomson & Rowan, 1996) investigated a wide range of facilities and many hundreds of students of all ages, providing a broad perspective on IEP implementation in this country. The largest study into special education policy (SE2000) so far, Massey University (2002), did not investigate the efficacy of IEPs or the partnerships which evolve within the IEP process. Also of interest to this thesis is the scant mention in the Massey report or other research of the role and effectiveness of fundholder schools like Midland. Further research is needed to investigate in greater detail parental concerns identified by Thomson and Rowan, as well as other barriers to parental involvement, particularly at the secondary level. There also appears to be very little research into SE2000 policy in relation to whether the prescribed IEP processes have effected any improvements in collaborative partnering; whether parents can influence programming through shared decision-making in IEPs or how responsive IEP teams are to parental opinion remains unclear, again, especially at the secondary school level. Further, there appears to be very limited New Zealand research into whether or not IEP processes involve parents in planning, assessment, reporting or evaluation processes outside of formal meetings, although one New Zealand project at primary school level (Wisnewski, 2002) suggests the IEP format constrains team members to formal six monthly meetings and other models may be more effective.

Hallahan and Kauffman (2000) point out considerable attention needs to be paid to pre-conference, conference and post-conference planning to ensure beneficial outcomes occur. However, it is possible that the imposition of IEPs has simply created more 'professionalisation' (Rock, 2000), bureaucracy (Altemueller, 2001) or a highly variable, dislocated (Wylie, 2000), or undersubscribed (Thomson & Rowan, 1996) system of planning for students with special educational needs. Research is needed that improves information and direction in the drive for beneficial development of the IEP process in high schools in this country. While there is a larger body of research from overseas, especially the United States, the political and legal frameworks, and the structure of secondary school teacher education in other countries make relationships in each country unique. This study then provides important perspectives for families and professionals attempting to form effective partnerships in Aotearoa/New Zealand at the secondary school level.

1.8.3 Relationship to Practice

Unlike much academic research, but like action research, and in keeping with the thinking of Ainscow (1998) for example, the recommendations of this research suggest direct and immediate intervention, which can be examined, implemented, rejected or adjusted by the

participants themselves. The matrix analysis provides an accessible model from which to tackle change, in a logical, cohesive, but not overwhelming manner.

1.9 ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

The remainder of the report is presented in five further chapters. Chapter two provides a review of the current literature related to the development of home-school and community collaborative partnerships in general and special education (including IEP partnerships) in particular. The benefits of and challenges to such partnerships are discussed generally and in relation to the key processes of inclusion, transition and teacher education.

Chapter three presents the methodology employed in the study and explains the philosophical and theoretical rationale for the methods adopted: an eclectic action-driven approach utilising case study methodology. The emergence of three major themes (opportunity, support, and communication) and three major spheres of influence (school climate, school systems and individual relationships) are then introduced as a matrix of nine thematic clusters. The methods section includes descriptions of the research setting, the participants, the researcher's role, and data collection and analysis techniques. Further information presented in chapter three includes validity, reliability and limitations of the study and ethical considerations.

Chapter four describes the diverse findings emerging from the data and marshals the various participants' perspectives and quantitative data analyses into the matrix of thematic clusters. The matrix is expanded in this chapter to include several sub-themes which emerged through the analysis process. A description of both the positive and negative aspects of each sub-theme is a feature of the analysis.

Chapter five discusses the implications for practice of the major findings in relation to the literature review presented in chapter two. Chapter six reviews the foregoing discussion and provides an evaluation of this study. It concludes with a series of recommendations, conceptualised within the three broad spheres of influence. These recommendations could form the basis of staff discussions and the development of an action plan. Such a plan would incorporate the aim of providing greater opportunity, increased support and more robust communication processes for parents, families and whānau of students with significant disabilities. The scope of the study is also delimited and limitations discussed in this chapter,

along with suggestions for further research. A glossary of terms and Māori words is included following chapter six.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the study first by providing a background focus statement about home-school partnerships and IEPs in general, secondly by presenting the research focus, and thirdly by introducing issues in the specific research domain: special education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, particularly related to the secondary education sector. To develop equitable partnerships in this domain, one must grapple with unresolved paradigm clashes, structural limitations, sector specific barriers, parental disengagement, power imbalances, communication issues and developing student identity. The research purpose, focus and methodology were then introduced with reference to the role of the researcher and the significance of the study within current understandings. Finally, a précis describing the organisation of the report was presented.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Increasingly, schools are developing an appreciation of the vital role parental and family involvement can play in the education and development of young people, including secondary school students (Decker & Decker, 2003; Fraser, 2005; Reilly, 2003). However, the ways in which schools translate this notion into practice can range from little more than paying 'lip-service' to government policy (Epstein et al., 2002; Fraser, 2005) through to complete restructuring for full family and community participation (Berger, 2000; Sailor, 2002; St John, Griffith & Allen-Hayes, 1997). The nature of parental involvement and its development into the contemporary notion of *collaborative partnership* is presented in this chapter.

IEPs provide a context for one type of collaborative partnership, generally developed within special education for the specific purpose of individualising education for selected students (Quinn & Ryba, 2000). However, IEPs need not be exclusively the domain of special education and Lovey (2002) provides a working example of wider-school teachers reviewing IEPs and liaising with both parents and other teachers. The very existence of *special* education is a controversial and evolving issue (Bailey, 1998; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Heller, 1995; Mitchell, 2000; Paul & Cranston-Gingras, 2002; Slee, 1998) as it has historically focussed attention on the individual learner and their deficits, rather than all learners within a particular context (O'Brien & Ryba, 2005). Processes within special education can be shown to create opportunities and supports, as well as barriers, to the educational endeavours of teenagers and their parents (e.g., Ashman & Elkins, 2002; Booth, 1998; Dom, 2002; Fish & Evans, 1995; Huefner, 2000; Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; Wylie, 2000).

The extent to which students are successfully included in everyday activities with their peers (Pumpian, 1999; Sailor, 2002; Westwood, 2003) and the effectiveness of transitions between classes, between schools and into the community, are key processes for students (Fish & Evans, 1995; Foreman, 2004; Lipsky, 1989; McGee, Ward, Gibbons, & Harlow, 2004; Patton, 2004). In all cases the success of these endeavours is strongly influenced by (a) the development of clear systems for open reciprocal communication amongst the student's team of professionals, their parents, their communities and themselves (Decker & Decker, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002; Friend & Cook, 2003; Thousand, Villa, Paolucci-Whitcomb & Nevin, 1995); (b) effective school policy implemented by supportive school management (Decker & Decker, 2003; Mentis, Quinn & Ryba, 2005); and (c) the quality of field-based knowledge, professional understanding

and the interpersonal skills of teachers (Brownell, Rosenberg, Sindelar & Smith, 2004). Along with the notion of collaborative partnerships, these concerns are elaborated in the following sections.

2.1 INVOLVEMENT, COLLABORATION, PARTNERSHIP

Involvement describes any way that a parent or family member is active in their child's education or the life of the school (Taylor, 2000), and may not involve collaboration. *Collaboration* refers to a style of interpersonal relationship (Friend & Cook, 2003) and describes one way in which involvement can occur, while *partnership* refers to an entity (a group) with a specific membership. Effective partnerships between families, schools and communities create a support system for collaborative action that is responsive to the educational as well as the broader concerns of the partners (Decker & Decker, 2003; Friend & Cook, 2003). While involvement is not the same as collaboration or partnership, *collaborative partnership* is not possible without active parental involvement.

Several authors caution that words such as *collaboration*, *equity* and *partnership* can be seen as 'floating' or 'empty' signifiers, open to a wide range of interpretations, potentially obscuring injustices and power imbalances. Words like these are employed freely in the contemporary educational rhetoric of social justice and are frequently accepted at face value. However, this assumption of truth or virtue can mask social and political structures and discourses which may actually work within partnerships to control and disempower already disadvantaged participants (David, 2004; Paul, French et al., 2002). It is important therefore not to assume that beneficial qualities *exist* simply because the terms have been invoked (Franklin, Bloch & Popkewitz, 2004; Friend & Cook, 2003; Harry, 1992).

The contemporary notion of collaboration (Berger, 2000; Coil, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002; Fraser, 2005; Friend & Cook, 2003; Idol et al., 2000; Parette & Petch Hogan, 2000; Rock, 2000; Salend, 1998; Taylor, 2000) is believed to carry an agreed set of values and principles. Alongside the concept of partnership as an *equitable* entity (Wolfendale, 2000, 2002), collaboration provides an ethical framework around which to examine practice. Friend and Cook (2003), Harry (1992), Lipsky (1989), and Thousand et al. (1995) insist that collaboration cannot occur without parity; a situation where each person's contribution is equally valued, goals and tasks are agreed and each person shares equal power and accountability in critical decision-making. The idea of a *collaborative partnership* encapsulates

those processes based on the broad principles of communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust, and respect (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson & Beegle, 2004). Partners in a collaborative framework participate actively and freely. Friend and Cook believe that imposed partnerships, as is the case with those prescribed by ORRS IEPs, are not collaborative.

2.2 PARENTS / FAMILIES IN SCHOOLS:

Some History

During the 1960s working partnerships between parents and schools took on greater significance as projects such as 'Head Start' in the USA linked local communities, parents, social service agencies and educational institutions in the provision of education both to children and their parents/caregivers (Berger, 2000; Diffily, 2003; Franklin et al., 2004). Diffily reports that research on these programmes found a correlation between stronger involvement of families and school success for their children. In the USA, each reauthorisation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), originally passed in 1975 as the Education of all Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142), and other government initiatives have placed increasing emphasis on the role and 'concerns' of parents and families in the education of their family member with disabilities (Berger 2000; Gestwicki, 2000; Huefner, 2000; Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000). "Collaborative partnership in the design and implementation of special education programmes is one of [IDEA's] six principles" (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). The 2004 reauthorisation places even greater emphasis on transition, inclusion and reporting to parents (Council for Exceptional Children, 2004).

The intention to create partnerships between schools, parents and their communities gained momentum in this country in the 1980's (Department of Education, 1987; Taskforce to review education administration, 1988; Lange, 1988). Parents, on Boards of Trustees, have had legal governance of New Zealand schools since the passing of the 1989 Education Act (NZ Government, 1989). *Equity* and *choice* were founding principles in the rhetoric of the education reforms of the 1980s (Mitchell, 2000), yet they are now seen as principles requiring considerable attention if they are to be actually implemented by parents and school-based teams (Paul et al., 2002; Peters, 2003; Thousand et al., 1995). For example, Peters found that the decisions reached within IEP meetings were a predictable outcome of the participants' understandings of what *should* be produced by such 'teams'. Outcomes were therefore based on pre-determined patterns and were not those that would result from discussions in a more empowering context. In further examples Wolfendale (2002) notes that throughout the 1980's

British parents consistently expressed dissatisfaction with the slowness of schools to develop satisfactory partnerships.

A growing body of research and discussion employs a post-modern/post-structuralist approach (Babbie, 2001; Foucault, 1978; Rabinow and Rose, 2003; Gutek, 2004) to examine the nature of structural barriers (Franklin et al., 2004; Marshall, 2000; Mitchell, 2000; Olssen et al., 2004; Peters, 2003). These include, for example, the use of labels and categories (Neilson, 2005; Paul & Cranston-Gingras, 2002), or exclusionary (Dorn, 2002), and undemocratic practices (Mouffe, cited in Nadesan & Elenes, 1998), which can be seen to limit equitable partnerships (see also Chapter three). Such practices could be viewed as being influenced by dominant discourses, which act to create and maintain power imbalances between parents and teachers (Cherryholmes, 1988; David, 2004; Harry, 1992; Neilson, 2000, 2005), for example in IEP decision-making (Peters, 2003).

Educational 'partnerships' such as Head Start were shown to follow a second agenda, which, according to Franklin et al. (2004), was to gain greater support for the institutional goals of education from the parents and community, predicated on the norms of the dominant culture. Such norms act to marginalize minority groups, such as those with disabilities. Further, Harry (1992) asserted this dominant discourse cast parents in the role of consumers of educational products delivered by 'experts'. This situation created passivity in parents, a bind which is particularly evident for families from cultural minorities (Kalyanpur, Harry & Skrtic, 2000).

2.2.1 Levels and Types of Involvement and Partnerships

Parents of children with disabilities have been ascribed many labels and roles over the years; some of them far from positive or constructive (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Paul & Cranston-Gingras, 2002; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001, cited in Friend & Cook, 2003). More recently, the notion of parents and *families* as collaborators in the education of children has signalled a recognition that all family members have important contributions to make.

Five 'types' of parental involvement were presented by Epstein and Dauber (1991) as constituting a framework of relationships between families and schools: (a) parenting responsibilities; (b) communication, with a basic obligation on schools; (c) volunteering - family contribution at school; (d) learning at home - family involvement with children on

educational activities; and (e) decision making - family participation in school governance and advocacy.

Epstein and Hollifield (1996) revised these and added a sixth strand - collaborating with community organisations. Community partnership had gained significance in the interceding five years, and more recently is supported by numerous other authors including Arthur and Bailey (2000), Gestwicki (2000), Macfarlane (2005), Sailor (2002), Salend (1998), Sax, Fisher, Chappell and Pratt (1999), Springate and Stegeline (1999) and St John et al. (1997). In general, the trend in the literature signals strong support for further refinement of practices and increased collaboration between families, schools and communities. (Coil, 2003; Decker & Decker, 2003; Deiner, 1999; Epstein et al., 2002; Fraser, 2000, 2005; Hildebrand et al., 2000; Parrette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Robinson, 2004; Thomas, Correa & Morsink, 2001; Thousand et al., 1995; Turnbull, Turbiville & Turnbull, 2000; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin & Williams, 2000; Wolfendale, 2002).

Turnbull et al. (2000) promote an emancipatory model of “collective empowerment” (p.641) in family-professional partnerships which has evolved over the past forty years into a concept of equitable power sharing *through* collective synergy, emphasising “group energy and creativity” (p.632). They describe previous relationship patterns as characterised by “power-over” parents and “power-with” parents. Decker & Decker, (2003), Gestwicki (2000) and Wolfendale (2000, 2002) also describe ideal parental partnerships which resemble the model of Turnbull et al. Parents are viewed as “essential partners with the school as co-producers of education” (Berger, 2000, p.285). Each relationship is unique (Friend & Cook, 2003) and the family and student’s vision and goals for the future should be viewed as precious and given priority (Deiner, 1999). Fostered by collaborative teamwork, knowledge, skill and motivation, such vision can generate real emancipating life changes for students and their parents (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996). In summary, emancipatory collaborative models of partnership provide a challenge to resolve the structural problems illuminated by the post-modernists. A further analysis of barriers to partnership is presented in section 2.5.

2.2.2 The IEP Partnership

Founded on the principles of participatory democracy (Altemueller, 2001), parental partnership is a cornerstone of the IEP process and has been embedded in American law since 1975 through Public Law 95-142 (Lipsky, 1989; Taylor, 2000). IEP partnerships emerged in British schools, as ‘statements’ following the publication of the Warnock report in 1978 (Fish & Evans, 1995;

Wolfendale, 2002) and subsequent legislation (Russell, 2002), and in New Zealand, following the 1987 Draft Review of Special Education (Department of Education, 1987). This review “concluded that resources should be delivered on the basis of the needs of the learner and all those most closely concerned with the child should be part of the decision making” (Moltzen, 2000, p.134). Subsequently, law (New Zealand Government, 1989), policies such as Special Education 2000 (MOE, 1996), Special Education Policy Guidelines (MOE, 2003c) and IEP Guidelines (MOE, 1998b) have strengthened the processes for partnership in this country (Fraser, 2000).

IEPs are based on the notion of a team, with representatives from different spheres of the student’s life. The culture and practice of each IEP team dictates how readily parents are able to participate as respected team members (Dabkowski, 2004). There is a strong movement contending IEPs are not well implemented (Taylor, 2000; Thomson & Rowan, 1996) and that such resource intensive, deficit orientated practices are discriminatory, limiting true inclusion and preventing an equitable focus on the diverse needs of all students (Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Nevertheless, when used effectively the IEP is generally considered an appropriate tool to ensure all exceptional children are able to reach their goals (Berger, 2000; Clark, 2000; Lovey, 2002; Moltzen, 2005; Quinn & Ryba, 2000).

According to Huefner (2000), the IEP is both a product (a written document with several elements) and a process (with several stages). In New Zealand the IEP process occurs in three phases which recur cyclically, generally twice each year: preparation, implementation and evaluation. Ideally, it incorporates (a) identification of students and teams; (b) the pooling of appropriate assessments and information to promote learning; (c) collaborative decision making, including equitable allocation of roles and responsibilities for planning, implementation and assessment; (d) writing a plan incorporating agreed goals, and learning outcomes; (e) designing an appropriate programme to promote learning; (f) diligently implementing the programme; (g) on-going collaborative review and assessment (including effective feedback) of student progress and teaching processes; and (h) formal evaluation (Chasty & Friel, 1993; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; MOE, 1998b; Moltzen, 2000, 2005; Rock, 2000; Taylor, 2000; Thomson & Rowan, 1996). Sadler (1989) argues strongly that on-going review and feedback is vital to student success.

2.3 BENEFITS OF PARENTAL / FAMILY / WHĀNAU INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

Henderson (1998, cited in Taylor, 2000), Henderson and Berla (cited in Decker & Decker, 2003) and the American National PTA (cited in Diffily, 2003) have completed extensive research surveys and extrapolated a raft of impressive benefits accrued from increased parental involvement. Of particular interest to this thesis are the findings that (a) students who are farthest behind at the start of a programme, including students with disabilities, make the most gains; (b) gains are accrued to high school students as well as other levels of schooling; and (c) parent involvement is a very powerful indicator of school success. In addition, mutual trust, mutual benefit and a sense of community develop as the voices of those normally excluded from policy discussions and decision making join meaningful networks (Decker & Decker, 2003; Friend & Cook, 2003; Jorgensen, 1999). Students benefit directly from parental involvement, with improved goal-setting abilities, increased homework completion and other home learning activities, attendance, morale and academic results (Berger, 2000; Deslandes, Royer, Potvin & Leclerc, 1999; Diffily, 2003; Epstein & Hollifield, 1996; Sanders & Epstein, 1998; Sanders, Epstein, and Connors-Tandros, 1999).

Homework is a key aspect of home-school relationships (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000) and the development of skills for students with disabilities (Armstrong, 1991, cited in Taylor, 2000). It has a positive effect on school achievement, even though special problems exist for such students (Berger, 2000; Coil, 2003; Deslandes et al, 1999; Polloway, Patton & Serna, 2001), and parents may need assistance to establish effective homework environments and routines (Taylor, 2000; Warger, 2001). Homework, particularly interactive homework, which parents and students complete together (Epstein et al. 2002), is also an important vehicle for informing parents about students' capabilities and progress, and providing new ways for parents to interact with their children (Taylor, 2000).

2.3.1 The IEP

In requiring the use of IEPs, legislators and policy makers have presumed that parental participation would result in benefits to individual students by creating a climate of cooperation between their parents and their schools (Morgan, 1982, cited in Rock, 2000; Taylor, 2000). Generally, the literature on parent involvement now supports this assumption (Decker & Decker, 2003, Fraser, 2000; Robinson, 2004) and parents are generally satisfied with IEP processes (Oleniczak, 2002; Thomson & Rowan, 1996), although this has not always been the case (Lipsky, 1989). Thomson and Rowan found parents valued the IEP process as a vehicle

for communication, fostering partnership between parents and teachers, focussing on student need and direction and assisting in transition processes. Other benefits reported are related to the structure of the IEP process itself (Moltzen, 2000). At least in theory, teachers now regularly assess and report findings to other key people in the IEP team. Parents are also essential to, (Armstrong, 1991, cited in Taylor, 2000) and presumed to be involved in, planning, decision-making and assessment (MOE, 1998b). However, the present study will show this is not necessarily the case. The contemporary emphasis on authentic assessment in natural learning environments within an ecological model (Reschly, 1995; Moltzen, 2000, 2005; Quinn & Ryba, 2000) means parents are well placed to make significant contributions.

2.4 PROMOTING COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Parent involvement is most effective when it is comprehensively planned (Decker & Decker, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002; Taylor, 2000). Parents of teenagers with disabilities need encouragement to view themselves as worthwhile participants in educational endeavours (Cochrane & Dean, cited in Berger, 2000; Deslandes et al., 1999). Unlike other parents they may be reluctant because they do not perceive they can make a difference (Deslandes et al, 1999; Berger, 2000). It would appear then that greater efforts may be required in creating opportunities and supports to gain their participation. In general, results of research surveys (Henderson, 1998, cited in Taylor, 2000; Henderson and Berla, cited in Decker & Decker, 2003; American National PTA, cited in Diffily, 2003) have found more comprehensive parental involvement both at home and at school when both opportunities and supports for involvement are increased by schools. An underlying supportive and caring school climate and culture, well planned opportunities and comprehensive support systems are needed to increase both parent and student participation. Further, the types of opportunities and supports, and level of teacher commitment were shown to directly affect the nature and efficacy of parental response (Decker & Decker, 2003; Epstein et al; 2002; Taylor, 2000). The current study aims to identify ways these processes can be strengthened in secondary schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand, an area which has hitherto received limited attention, although Henderson (1996, cited in Whyte, 2005) provides an illustration of positive outcomes which can result from such endeavours for Tokelauan girls.

Parental participation initiatives need to be approached in relation to both home and school activities in order to be effective (Taylor, 2000), and should include a focus on improving the culture and practices of individual IEP teams (Dabkowski, 2004). Several positive interpersonal and procedural supports are variously recommended and generally agreed in the literature:

Parents from all cultures need (a) to be assured teachers like, respect, value, care and know about their child and themselves; (b) welcoming, flexible, 'parent friendly', culturally sensitive practices and meeting spaces, including providing child care, ensuring privacy when needed, accommodating parents' schedules and encouraging visits; (c) sound information including details of programmes and student progress, information regarding the agreed roles and responsibilities of various staff members, advance notice of events, provision of clear agendas and summaries of outcomes (d) excellent on-going responsive, communication systems and interpersonal relationships; and (e) approachable schools and individual teachers, committed to the principles of equitable partnership (Berger, 2000; Cimera, 2003; Coil, 2003; Dabkowski, 2004; Decker & Decker, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002; Fraser, 2000; Friend & Cook, 2003; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Lytle & Bourdin, 2001; McLachlan, 1998, cited in Fraser, 2000; Macfarlane, 2000, 2005; Moltzen, 2000; North & Carruthers, 2004; Quinn & Ryba, 2000; Rock, 2000; Salend; 1998; Taylor, 2000; Whyte, 2005).

Deslandes et al. (1999) found the most salient predictors of positive outcomes for special education students were Epstein's *Type 1* and *Type 4* practices. Type 1 involves effective parenting, which includes encouraging a balance between homework and other activities, and Type 4 involves learning at home, including homework completion, positive attitudes and promoting student self-efficacy as a learner (e.g. see Epstein et al., 2002; see also section 2.2.1).

2.4.1 Family Systems

The concept of family orientated partnerships leads to an awareness of the complexity of influences affecting a student at any time (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). Although support remains for developing small quantifiable goals (e.g. Timmons, 1996), any successful intervention or teaching process with a child, or collaborative endeavour with a family must necessarily involve understanding their family and/or whānau system (Berger, 2000; Cullen & Carroll-Lind, 2005; Decker & Decker, 2003; Deiner, 1999; Friend & Cook, 2003; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Macfarlane, 2000; Reilly, 2003; Taylor, 2000, Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996, 2002). It is important to be aware of the family's position in its 'life-cycle', its aspirations, dreams and vision, and its responses to the inclusion of a person with disabilities (Berger, 2000; Fraser, 2000; Fraser, 2005; Friend & Cook, 2003; Parette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Reilly, 2003), including its responses to grief (Kubler-Ross, 1977). Epstein and Hollifield (1996) reviewed the research literature to that date and Robinson (2004) has reviewed the more current literature. They report an increasing recognition amongst educators of family centred or ecological perspectives and the ongoing influence exerted by home-school-family dynamics. Family

systems differ significantly between cultures, and a family-systems approach can help to illuminate the styles and preferences of families from minority cultures in ways which will enhance effective collaboration in school. Understanding the beliefs, styles and values of family/whānau from minority cultures and responding sensitively to these diverse understandings can also reduce the risk of mere assimilation into mainstream or dominant culture, while encouraging educators to view their own attitudes and assumptions with critical reflection (Ryba & Annan, 2005; Watts & Tutwiler, 2003).

Family systems frameworks, underpinned especially by the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), can offer insights into family perspectives, functions and activities. Sontag (1996) describes Bronfenbrenner's systems theory in relation to family mesosystems and exosystems (see also chapter three) emphasising, "the importance of mutual trust, a positive orientation and goal consensus between the linking person (e.g. parent) and individuals in the non-home settings (e.g. teachers)... [which] are beneficial when their actions are [on] behalf of the developing person" (p.8). Examples of family-systems based approaches to describing and explaining the environments of children with exceptionalities, and to developing collaborative relationships with their families are described by Ballard (1998), Berger (2000), Cullen & Carroll-Lind (2005), Epstein et al., (2002), Fraser (2000), Friend & Cook (2003), Hildebrand et al., (2000), Macfarlane (2000), Reilly (2003), Sailor (2002), Taylor (2000), Turnbull and Turnbull (1996, 2002).

2.4.2 Partnership Services and Support Groups

Community based support groups and organisations for parents of children with disabilities perform supportive advocacy and advisory roles. They provide information on how to assist children, as well as support for the parents themselves (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Robinson, 2004), who may be at risk of significant social isolation (Fraser, 2000). Links with these groups and community based government agencies need to be established and maintained by schools (Decker & Decker, 2003; Fish & Evans, 1995; Wolfendale, 2002).

2.4.3 The Role of the Principal and School Policy

The principal and school administrators have a key role to play in developing partnerships with families and communities (Decker & Decker, 2003; Taylor, 2000; Thomas et al., 2001), with the power to enhance the efforts of individual IEP teams (Dabkowski, 2004) and the overall

inclusiveness of systems (Buswell, 1999; Sax et al., 1999). The key responsibilities regarding parents are (a) to encourage opportunities and expectations which promote collaborative consultation (Thousand et al., 1995), (b) to build and maintain staff enthusiasm, (c) to design a programme allowing teachers autonomy to work freely with parents, (d) to build school climate and parent-principal relationships, (e) to ensure coordination occurs, (f) to make critical decisions and show leadership (Berger, 2000), and (g) to provide a structure for in-service training as well as other supports and resources (Buswell, 1999; Decker & Decker, 2003; Quinn & Ryba, 2000).

The principal also has a key role to play in promoting the development of school policy that ensures (a) students with special education needs have access to all education programmes and school provisions; (b) their parents are included in programme development; (c) the impact of decisions made regarding school-wide factors such as school organisation, timetable and allocation of space, time and resources are taken into account; and (d) parents remain informed of all processes affecting their children (Quinn & Ryba, 2000). Schools that manage funds for their ORRS students, including Midland High, must have a policy and procedures approved by the MOE (MOE, 2004c; District Manager, personal communication, May 21, 2004).

Stangvik (1998) suggests special education policy may frequently be generated to reflect the needs of schools and teachers, rather than the needs of the students. As noted by Booth (1998) policy must protect the rights of students and their parents. One way to increase advocacy in this process and include parents in decision-making and policy development is to establish a collaborative special needs committee including parents, teachers, administrators and students, which can drive a range of parental involvement initiatives and foster support networks (Mentis et al., 2005).

Networks are described by Evans, Lunt, Wedell and Dyson (1999) as effective means for the efficient pooling of expertise and information, because they are not limited by the traditional slowness of hierarchies or the competitive problems with markets. Evans et al. also point out that less formal networks can cater for the differing cultures and processes that operate within each community organisation, allowing more flexible collaboration. Arthur and Bailey (2000) and Paul and French et al. (2002) urge schools to particularly promote caring community values, without which individualism may further marginalise groups most in need of community support. Such networks can also support effective collaboration between school, home and community services (Quinn & Ryba, 2000). Family meetings have been promoted by some

authors as one approach to be explored which is beneficial to home-school partnerships and networks (Coil, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Salend, 1998).

2.4.4 Communication

The ideal IEP represents the endeavours of a collaborative partnership. Strong interpersonal skills and effective reciprocal communication systems are vital to the success of such partnerships (Decker & Decker, 2003; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Idol et al., 2000). Professionals have a responsibility to exercise the kinds of communication skills which promote a desirable form of partnership (Berger, 2000; Cimera, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Epstein & Hollifield, 1996; Epstein et al., 2002; Friend & Cook, 2003; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000). Of particular importance is the need to ensure the cultural understandings of families are received respectfully (Culata & Thompkins, 1999; Parrette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Taylor, 2000; Thomas, Correa & Morsink, 2001; Whyte, 2005) and fully incorporated in the teams' practices to minimise any sense of cultural alienation from school (McFarlane, 2000; Thomas et al., 2001; Whyte, 2005; Wilkie, 2001) or unfair interpretation of assessment results (Bevan-Brown, 2002; Culatta & Tompkins, 1999).

As part of a broad review of special education policy and processes in Aotearoa/New Zealand Massey University (2002) surveyed parents receiving special education services and the schools their children attended. Although 90% of parent respondents expressed a positive view of their working relationship with schools and around 75% said they had a high level of partnership; around half indicated that schools could improve their communication with parents, and 64% felt they were not given enough information by schools. It is difficult to imagine parents successfully accessing opportunities for involvement and partnership if they are not given adequate information and communication is sub-standard (see also Oleniczak, 2002). Lack of dedicated time to liaise with parents and colleagues means teachers have a problem in this area, which could be mitigated through effective IEPs (Lovey, 2002). Important processes for establishing rapport and two way communication systems include telephone calls, home visits, written communication such as home-school diaries or notebooks, parent visits at the school and vice versa, parent-teacher conferences, school activities, sharing comments on student work and informal opportunities for involvement (Decker & Decker, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Lovey, 2002; Thorburn, 1997).

The communication of positive personal attributes also influences teachers' relationships with parents (Comer & Haynes 1991, cited in Diffily 2003; Fraser, 2005). Attributes such as

openness, approachability, warmth, sensitivity, flexibility, reliability, trust, respect, acceptance and accessibility are important to parents (e.g. Decker & Decker, 2003; Rock, 2000). Berger (2000), Friend and Cook (2003), and Lytle and Bordin (2001) point out that the complex, reciprocal process of communication involves so much more than just words. Everything a 'sender' or 'receiver' says or does contributes to the creation of shared meanings, with the spoken word accounting for only 7% of meaning in any conversation (Miller, Wackman, Nunnally and Miller, 1988; cited in Berger 2000). Nichols and Read (2002) contend that the circulation of knowledge about children's problems at school is a complex networking process which can occur in unpredictable ways. However, good face-to-face communication skills, including active listening, and appropriate non-verbal language, are essential ingredients (Smith, 1986, cited in Berger, 2000).

2.4.5 The role of the Student

Some work has found the students themselves to be the least involved and least informed members of the IEP team (Martin, Marshall & Sale, 2004; also see Thomson & Rowan, 1995). However students are central to the process and should be involved as much as possible (Ryba & Annan, 2000), especially as they get older (Idol et al., 2000). Parents strongly endorse the concept of student involvement (Gillespie, 1981, cited in Martin et al., 2004; Thomson & Rowan, 1996) and positive outcomes accrue, for parents as well as for students, when they are involved. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the MOE believe students to be core members of the IEP team without whose involvement, effective implementation cannot occur (MOE, 1998b). Authors such as McGahee, Mason, Wallace and Jones (2001) have focused on producing material to enhance student involvement in their IEP meetings, focussing on building essential skills over time and providing practice. One barrier to student participation is limited self-determination. The development of self-determination skills is important in whether a student is able to manage their own affairs and become increasingly independent of their parents in post-school life (Field, 2003). Grigal, Neubert, Moon and Graham (2003) found that most parents and many high school teachers now support teaching self-determination skills in high school. Self-determination skills are promoted when students actively participate in their own IEPs (Patton, 2004).

2.5 BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS

Despite the intention of the 1980's reforms and an increasing emphasis on partnership in government policy (MOE, 1996, 1998b, 2003a, 2003c, 2004b), parental contact with schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand has not in fact increased (Baker, 2002); apart from those parents on boards of trustees, the levels remain the same or slightly lower than pre-reform figures (Fraser, 2005).

Most parents of high school students believe they do not have enough contact with their teenager's school (Berger, 2000). Undoubtedly, parents could be (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999), and want to be, more involved (Berger, 2000; North & Carruthers, 2004; Robinson, 2004). It could be argued that parents of students receiving IEPs have had more opportunities than regular parents to influence the course of their children's educational careers. However, parents are disadvantaged in their endeavours by several barriers to effective partnership that are not so different to those identified by Lipsky (1989) more than fifteen years ago. Reluctance to change, and 'hard to shake' discourses, which keep parents in the role of supporters who *supplement* school endeavours and advance the causes of the school (for an example, see Robinson, 2004) continue to disadvantage parents.

Fraser (2005) lists barriers to partnerships in special education in this country as (a) schools paying lip service to partnership, (b) schools being hostile and unwelcoming, (c) teachers assuming the role of an 'expert', (d) teachers' lack of respect for students, (e) teachers' controlling style towards parents, (f) teachers treating parents as though they have a disability, (g) schools' failure to include family/whānau, (h) teachers' lack of understanding of parents' feelings, (i) parents not valuing the work of teachers, and (j) parental overload. Further, in some cultures, parents do not traditionally become involved in the students schooling (Whyte, 2005).

Several international authors variously list similar 'road-blocks' generated by both parents and schools including (a) feelings of intimidation; (b) lack of welcome and privacy; (c) teacher dominance, including reluctance to share power, talking time, professional knowledge and 'expert' terminology; (d) lack of shared goals; (e) poor information flow; (f) passive parental styles; (g) parental work commitments, time conflicts and transportation problems; (h) cultural differences, including language and communication difficulties; (i) child care needs and sometimes over-protection of students; and (j) parents' hostility and low regard for school (Berger, 2000; Decker & Decker, 2003; Deslandes et al., 1999; Kalyanpur et al., 2000, cited in

Robinson, 2004; Martin et al., 2004; Rock, 2000; Taylor, 2000; Thomson & Rowan, 1996; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1996; Wylie, 2000).

Deslandes et al. (1999) point out that parents feeling of unwelcome may derive from the students themselves as well as from teachers and the school in general. Further, they note the tendency of parents of special education students to disengage from their teenagers' schools. They suggest parents may feel powerless because they don't see themselves as effective in assisting their adolescent to learn and/or because they consider difficulties are related to a lack of luck. This point is critical, because if parents believe in bad luck and/or serendipity they may choose to disengage. Deslandes et al. assert, "If parents believe that school achievement is alterable, they will choose to become involved" (p.502).

Bird (1998, cited in Baker, 2002) found that most parental contact with schools in this country remains passive in nature, "at the level of 'being informed' or 'taking part in activities'" (p.3) and not related to decision making. This finding is often echoed in the IEP literature from overseas (Altemueller, 2001; Garriott, Pruitt, Wandry & Snyder, 2000; Peters, 2003). However, the parents themselves do not always perceive the situation in the same way; frequently believing instead that they contribute equally to meetings or are even forced to be strong, often confrontational advocates to get what their children needed (Buswell, 1999; Garriott et al., 2000).

A sense of serendipity may contribute to the different perspectives. People tend not to engage when school is working well, even though knowledge of successful approaches is critical if problems begin to occur (Buswell, 1999). By not contributing, parents may be indicating they believe things are going along happily. Further, some behaviours described by researchers as 'passive' were listed by parents as ways they contributed (Peters, 2003).

Garriott et al. (2000) found 45% of parents felt they were treated as equal, respected members of the team. Although this figure is alarmingly low, these parents had significant cause to believe they had parity and were able to articulate why. Previously (Goldstein, 1980, & Vaughn et al. 1988, both cited in Garriott et al., 2002), satisfied parents had little substantive reason for their complacency. This decline in fatalism could be a healthy sign that parents are becoming increasingly analytical of their circumstances.

Paradigm clashes (Harry, 1992; Mitchell, 2000; Moore et al., 1999) and unrecognised social constructs (Cherryholmes, 1988; Neilson, 2005; Peters, 2003) have also been implicated as barriers for parents. Such constructs may be predicated on the exclusionary, prejudicial medical discourse of disability where problems are experienced by individuals independently of their context, and may continue to be present in schools and society at large (e.g. Ballard, 1998, 1999; Fish & Evans, 1995; Harry, 1992; Neilson, 2000; Paul & Cranston-Gingras, 2002; Reschley, 1995; Smith, 2004). Constructs may also be predicated on neo-liberal precepts of individualism and competition (Fish & Evans; O'Neill, Clark & Openshaw, 2004), which serve to diminish transparency of needs of disadvantaged and minority groups (David, 2004; Hulston, 2000). Traditional power imbalances also remain, which constrain parents from expressing their aspirations and/or acting on them (e.g. Berry & Auhl, 2001; Moltzen, 2000; Stangvik, 1998; Thousand et al., 1995; Thomson & Rowan, 1996; see also chapter one).

The New Zealand experience is complicated by the existence of a fragmented and inconsistent provider of specialist education services (Wylie, 2000). Findings from Massey University (2002) also indicate efforts of the lead provider, SES (now MOE; Group Special Education), at collaboration were not viewed particularly favourably by parents. Limited contact with parents, especially around meeting times, restricted any real collaboration. Massey University found parents' concerns with special education processes also related to battles for funding and lack of trust surrounding allocation of resources. A general theme was that there was no real consultation about how resources would be used and some parents complained that meetings occurred between school and SES to which parents were not invited.

It is clear then that factors which may act as barriers to parental involvement are multifaceted (Dabkowski, 2004), and it would appear that IEP partnerships fall short of their ideal (Huefner, 2000; Oleniczak, 2002; Peters, 2003; Thomson & Rowan, 1996). However, parents generally view their partnership with their schools favourably (Massey University, 2002; Oleniczak, 2002). Further, the practice and culture of individual schools and IEP teams are also highly significant (Dabkowski, 2004). Both these factors provide hope that improvement is attainable.

2.6 DISADVANTAGES AND PROBLEMS WITH COLLABORATIVE IEP PARTNERSHIPS

The IEP may not be the most appropriate or inclusive model for determining services for students with diverse educational needs or developing partnerships with their parents (Thomson & Rowan, 1996). More flexible approaches are often described in the literature (Fraser, 2000;

Menlove et al., 2001; Ryba & Anan, 2000; Wisnewski, 2002). According to the MOE (1998b) many people see the IEP as a document to access teacher aide hours and other resources. Although this purpose is denied by the MOE in the same document, the IEP does serve a dual function which may not be in the best interests of educational assessment and planning. The need to work within special education teams and frequently to label students in order to obtain services is a recognised problem with the service delivery model (e.g. Kliewer & Biklen, 1995; Ryba & Annan, 2000).

A substantial number of writers are predicating their work on the belief that the regular classroom, even at secondary level, is the starting point for the education of all students (e.g. Andrews, 1996; Ashman & Elkins, 2002; Ballard, 1998, 1999; Foreman, 2004; Gearheart, Weishahn & Gearheart, 1996; Gee, 2002; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Jorgensen, 1999; Lipsky & Gartner, 1995; Lovey, 2002; Sailor, 2002; Sax, Fisher & Pumpian, 1999; Taylor, 2000; Thorburn, 1997; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). From this perspective IEPs in particular and special education in general can be seen to limit the effective inclusion of students with disabilities because the starting point is frequently an exclusionary model. The existence of special education as an entity creates ambiguities for the education of these students (Booth, 1998; Mitchell, 2000), particularly when it is seen as a place rather than a service (Bailey, 1998; Reschly, 1995).

Additionally, special education teachers hold more knowledge, power and 'expert' status than general education teachers and parents with regards IEPs and special programmes. This inequity reduces the parity of contributions at IEP meetings and increases parent and general teacher passivity. Special education is seen to act as a barrier to effective communication and therefore effective schooling (Martin et al., 2004). Peters (2003) points out that researched benefits of parental involvement have been related to parent involvement in specific learning areas, and not specifically in shared decision making. She contends that the problems are intrinsic to the nature of IEP meetings and teams themselves, therefore a different model is required to redress the inherent inequities.

Further, potential problems with the special education/IEP partnership model include the possibility of excessive involvement of parents expected to educate and support teachers, leading to difficulty balancing other life needs and changing family circumstances. Increasing parental involvement could also be seen as limiting the development of student self-determination and self-efficacy (Hanley-Maxwell, Whitney-Thomas & Pogolof, 1995, cited in Patton, 2004) or not welcomed by the student (Deslandes et al., 1999).

2.7 INCLUSION

In Aotearoa/New Zealand the Education Act of 1989 legislated, for young people with disabilities, the same right to enrol and receive education at the state school of their choice, with the same privileges and restrictions as any other student (N.Z. Govt., 1989; Davies & Prangnell, 2000). Assumptions of the benefits of inclusion are now embedded in the educational policy, rhetoric and, increasingly, practice of western countries. For example, Robinson (2004) reports that there are now no special classes in Victoria, Australia; the 1997 reauthorisation of IDEA presumes an inclusionary approach in the USA (Huefner, 2000); and the New Zealand curriculum purports to serve *all* students (Hulston, 2000; MOE, 1993).

As described earlier, there is a broad agreement that inclusion should be the starting point for all education. Ballard (1998, cited in Fraser, 2000) points to a number of studies showing both social and academic gains for students in inclusive settings. Although there is considerable work to be done in changing attitudes and practice, Pumpian (1999), Sailor (2002) and Shapiro (1999) assert that the academic debate surrounding inclusion in high schools has shifted focus from, "Why should we include students with disabilities?" to, "How do we do it better?" (Pumpian, p.160). Nonetheless, agreement is not universal (e.g. Bailey, 1998; Lieberman, 1996; Taylor, 2000) and inclusion cannot simply mean assimilation into the dominant culture; or submersing special education needs in the drive for inclusion (Slee, 1998); it must be about valuing diversity and difference (Booth, 1998; Fraser, 2000; Watts & Tutwiler, 2003). In fact, the educational setting parents 'choose' for their children can fall along a continuum representing a dual education provision (Mitchell, 2000). Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2002) reported on one high school where successful integration, involving acceptance but not automatic inclusion, appeared to work successfully, although teacher attitudes were limiting for some categories of students.

In one New Zealand study (McLachlan, 1998, cited in Fraser, 2000), almost all parents with children enrolled in a secondary school special education unit for intellectual disability believed that they were receiving the best option for their children. Benefits of the segregated option included class size, individual programmes, peers of similar ability, reduced academic demand and increased in-class support. However, Ballard (1998, 1999) dismisses the supposed benefits of segregation promoted by some authors as not sustained by research and cites Biklen (1995; 1998). In Ballard's view, children who are denied access to ordinary and everyday experiences of regular classes have a restricted zone of proximal development (see also Quinn & Ryba, 2000), which has a cumulative discriminatory effect, eventually denying them opportunities for employment and community involvement.

Special Education reforms in this country (MOE, 1996) introduced parental 'choice' in at least two novel ways: (a) ORRS funding effectively created a voucher system which parents could 'cash in' at any school, and (b) SEG (the special education grant) provided every school with a specific fund from which to service the needs of any other young person with special learning needs who chose to enrol (MOE, 1996). However, while the SEG guidelines (MOE, 1998a) did include rhetoric about parental involvement and shared decision-making, of the two, only ORRS provided a mechanism for parental partnership and decision making (through IEPs). Even that was to be just at a micro-level, related only to the educational needs of the identified individual young person verified in the scheme (Moltzen, 2000; Mitchell, 2000). Despite the legislation and government policy previously cited, many schools in New Zealand continued to be described as unwelcoming and discouraging or conversely, as 'magnet' schools for young people with disabilities (Mitchell, 2000; Purdue, Ballard, & MacArthur, 2001; Wylie, 2000; Wylie, 2002). Some authors, including Ballard (1998; 1999) and Smith (2004) believe strongly held attitudes, rather than educational need or preference may contribute most to decisions about whether students attend regular or segregated settings, and this situation represents the discourses dominant in society at large. Parents' aspirations for inclusion and normalcy continue to be limited by these discriminatory social constraints. In effect, parents continue to have limited choice.

The rhetoric of 'choice' is based on the neo-liberal theory that service-providers (schools) will respond to the wants of 'consumers' (parents), who, if dissatisfied, will simply find another provider in the education 'market' (Marshall, 2000; Olssen et al., 2004). Hulston (2000) found contradictions in MOE policy which allowed schools to present a "curriculum that fail[ed] to live up to its claims of inclusiveness" (p. 35). Students with disabilities remained excluded and "constituted as invisible" (Hulston, p.35) in New Zealand secondary schools. She found that a prevailing competitive, individualistic, market driven discourse prevented teachers from interpreting the curriculum as truly inclusive; a conclusion also reached by Ballard (1999). It also prevented class teachers from taking responsibility for the students with disabilities placed in their classrooms; a problem which has also been noted by Mitchell (2000). Further, market driven schools have eroded the link between schools and the development of citizenship, a concept which is central to the inclusion of all young people in society (Giroux, 1998).

2.7.1 Collaboration with General Educators

St John et al. (1997) urges teachers to reflect on how meaning is socially constructed in schools, challenging them to consider every child as special and deserving of a special education. Teachers, both special education and general, have a critical and essential role to play in change processes, which will result in more inclusive environments for students with special education needs in secondary schools (Lovey, 2002; Pumpian, 1999). While schools are no strangers to change processes (Mitchell, 2000; Thousand et al., 1995), change can be a daunting prospect which limits individual's capacity for innovation (Fullan, 1991; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000; York-Barr & Kronberg, 2002). Management support for positive change accompanied by sound processes can enhance the impact for students with special education needs (Dabkowski, 2004; Thousand et al., 1995). The introduction of change in small steps, building on current expertise, has been shown to be the most effective approach to improving classroom practice (Westwood, 2003). Walther-Thomas et al. recommend pilot initiatives as a way to model and prepare teachers for innovations, and York-Barr and Kronberg suggest special education and general teachers share case management of students with special needs as ways to reduce the stress of change. The strengthening of networks within school communities has advantages over market driven or hierarchical systems according to Evans et al. (1999), in that they promote an equitable pooling of resources and expertise.

General education teachers are now required as members of IEP teams in the USA (Huefner, 2000), and in Aotearoa/New Zealand the MOE expects general classroom teachers to be core members of the IEP team who "orchestrate... the overall planning and classroom programme, monitor... student progress, and provide... direction to the teacher aide if there is one" (MOE, 1998b, p.6). Research suggests that the success of inclusion frequently depends on the quality of communication, collaboration, congruence, and support among educators, other professionals and families (Buswell, 1999; Jorgensen, 1999; Salend, 1998; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000), including developing a mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities and specialised skills of each (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Lovey, 2002; Sax, Fisher, Chappell, et al., 1999; Thomas, Correa & Morsink, 2001; York-Barr & Kronberg, 2002). The implication here is that special education and general education teachers are clear in their roles and have agreed on their particular responsibilities (Thousand et al., 1995). However, this is often far from the case (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Mitchell, 2000; Paul & Cranston-Gingras, 2002).

General educator attendance at meetings produces benefits for other team members, especially parents. Martin et al. (2004) concluded that participants talked more about strengths and needs, felt more empowered to make decisions, had better knowledge of what to do next and felt better

about the meeting when classroom teachers were present. However general educator participation in IEPs has traditionally been limited (Thomson & Rowan, 1996; Martin, Marshall & Sale, 2004; Menlove et al., 2001). Logistical problems of general teacher involvement are a recognised challenge (Huefner, 2000; Menlove et al., 2001). Within schools “individuals who collaborate may... find that dilemmas occur related to the structural and professional isolation of schools” (Friend & Cook, 2003, p.23). General education teachers also often lack the terminology and expertise of their special education colleagues (Lytle & Bordin, 2001); yet shared knowledge and understandings are essential (Buswell, 1999; Decker & Decker, 2003; Thomas et al., 2001). Menlove et al. found most barriers to general teacher engagement with the IEP process related to five broad areas: team connection, time, preparation, training, and lack of relevance to the classroom. In their study, Martin et al. (2004) found general education teachers were not confident of the worth of their contributions, were uncertain about many aspects of the IEP process, and were less satisfied than other groups with the overall process.

Critically, both special education and regular teachers must address the ethical implications of their philosophical and pragmatic positions on the lives of those actually affected, the students themselves (Paul, French et al., 2002), before real progress can occur. Despite broad sociological factors, which can describe and explain the limitations of special education, individual teachers can and do have the capacity to change and improve matters for these students (Dorn, 2002).

2.8 TRANSITION

Transitions mark important milestones for students and families (Taylor, 2000) and support processes exist to provide continuity of provision and collaboration between significant people within the old and the new groups (Berger, 2000; Buswell, 1999; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000), as well as to ensure students develop the skills required for the next step in their lives. Further education, independent living and employment opportunities are all major considerations in transition from high school (Fish & Evans, 1995). While students who actively participate in their IEPs do better in job seeking once they leave school (Joyce, 1997), parents’ provide the continuity during transitions; their knowledge is crucial at these times (Buswell, 1999; Foreman, 2004; Lipsky, 1989). However, Lipsky reported high levels of parental dissatisfaction with transition processes and poor parental involvement.

The 1997 and 2004 reauthorisations of IDEA and increased federal funding have provided impetus for improving the transition process in the USA (Patton, 2004). The students’ post-

school aspirations and visions are now expected to provide the direction for developing (a) a plan of study and (b) a transition plan including the identification of transition services required by the student. However, students need more support to participate in meetings, including greater skills development and better information (Martin et al., 2004; McGahee et al., 2001).

Oleniczak (2002) reports parents continue to be concerned about the transition of their children with special education needs into high schools. Limited research has been carried out in New Zealand in relation to transition to high school (McGee, Ward, Gibbons & Harlow, 2004). However parents believe the IEP process assists this transition (Thomson & Rowan, 1996). Orientation activities, peer support and seeking information from primary schools are successful practices in some New Zealand secondary schools (McGee et al., 2004). One Australian study suggests the need for better communication systems for parents as their children with intellectual disability transition into high school to ensure the level of inclusion meets their expectations (Thomas & Graham, 2002).

2.9 TEACHER EDUCATION

That parents enter school relationships and IEP partnerships at a disadvantage has been discussed throughout this chapter. This situation needs to be addressed in both pre-service and in-service programmes. Teachers need enhanced knowledge, tools and support to create opportunities for active parental participation and decision making in IEPs and in schools in general (Dabkowski, 2004; Decker & Decker, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002; Martin, 2004; Pumpian, 1999; Rock, 2000; Thomson & Rowan, 1996; Williams, 1992, cited in Berger, 2000). Teacher education in relation to special education is not uniform (Brownell, Rosenberg, Sindelar & Smith, 2004). Neither is it consistent (Epstein, Sanders & Clark, 1999), mandated (Fish & Evans, 1995) or comprehensive (Henderson & Berla, cited in Diffily, 2003) in relation to preparation for parent partnerships or inclusive practice (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999). Neither are training programmes adequate for dealing with the demands of transition (Patton, 2004), student diversity (Paul, Epanchin, Rosselli, Duchnowski & Cranston-Gingras, 2002; Sorrells, Webb-Johnson & Townsend, 2004), ethical considerations or the complex nature of conflicting epistemologies (Paul, French et al., 2002).

Brownell et al. (2004) suggest that teacher education pedagogy is in need of reform and recommend a move towards more extensive modelling, within a 'field-based' model, to allow more direct experience of the issues involved. Practising teachers need (a) ongoing collegial peer and principal support over an extended period as programmes take hold, and (a) time for,

and school commitment to, preparation, training and effective policies and practice (Diffily, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002; Fraser, 2000; North & Carruthers, 2004; Sanders & Epstein, 1998; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Programmes must emphasise a “shared set of knowledge, values, and competencies” (Pumpian, 1999, p.166) between special and general educators (also see Martin et al., 2004; Thomas et al., 2001). Campbell, Gilmore and Cuskelly (2003) have demonstrated the efficacy of a pre-service module related to disability. Student teachers demonstrated improved knowledge, more positive attitudes and greater ease dealing with people with disabilities following a one semester course on Down syndrome, although a focus on specific categories of disability in teacher education remains contentious (Paul, French et al., 2002).

2.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The literature review has presented a discussion of parental involvement in schools, and secondary schools particular. The chapter began by drawing distinctions between *involvement*, *collaboration* and *partnership* in order to reach an understanding of *collaborative partnership*, followed by a brief background to parental involvement in schools generally and IEPs specifically. The benefits of involvement in both and the potential opportunities, supports, disadvantages and barriers were covered as they are presented in professional and research literature. The literature on improving home-school-community partnerships was canvassed. The role of support groups, principals, the students themselves and communication processes in general were highlighted as particularly significant. Three key topics, inclusion, transition and teacher education, were discussed in relation to their impact on home-school relationships.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the theoretical approach, research design and methods used to describe and explore IEP partnerships and wider school relationships at Midland High School. The design section includes background to two major research paradigms and a rationale for the approach taken in this study: an eclectic, action driven approach. The rationale is provided for selecting a predominantly qualitative approach using case study method and situating the case within an ecological frame of reference.

The methods section includes descriptions of the research site, the participants and the researcher's role. Data sources, collection procedures and analysis techniques, as well as validity, reliability, limitations and ethical considerations are also presented.

3.2 RESERCH DESIGN FRAMEWORK

The research literature describes two basic paradigms within which educational research generally occurs - the positivist and interpretivist paradigms (Allan, Brown & Riddell, 1998; Coleman & Lumby, 1999; Crotty, 1998; Gipps, 1994; Pring, 2000).

3.2.1 The Positivist Paradigm

This worldview has dominated special education since its inception (Clark, Dyson & Millward, 1998; Coleman & Lumby, 1999; Crotty, 1998; Lewis, 1998; Pring, 2000; Ryba & Annan, 2000). Sorrells, Rieth and Sindelar, (2004) describe positivism as based on scientific method and leading naturally to a quantitative approach to research. There is at least an implicit belief that objective research methods can be employed to study a world which is *real*. Research in this manner is believed to lead to the establishment of 'social facts' or 'truths' which are independent of the researcher and 'value free' and which can be clearly linked to specific causal factors. It is important to reduce social situations to the simplest of elements to ensure the research is not complicated by extraneous variables. A medical model exists within positivism where disabilities are seen as deficits situated within the individual, to be cured or ameliorated through the methods of medical science and educational psychology.

3.2.2 The Interpretivist Paradigm

Clark, Dyson and Millward (1998) have found that most authors now view disability and special needs in a broader context, where understanding what is happening in the totality of the situation becomes important. Special needs are seen as constructed by one or more of three basic social processes: (a) dominant social discourses; (b) the creation of 'failure' within social institutions and systems, with subsequent labelling and marginalisation of those who have 'failed the system'; and (c) social/economic processes which systematically disadvantage and marginalise some groups. These social processes intimately affect how disability is viewed (Dorn, 2002; Slee, 1998; Stangvik, 1998), what is seen as 'need' and whether those needs are considered 'special'. Knowledge and the way we deal with it are seen as socially constructed phenomena, specific to each of our situations in time and place (Ainscow, 1998; Clark et al. 1998), which generate our subjective realities (Coleman & Lumby, 1999). The nature of disability is open to interpretation (Ballard, 1996) and can be seen as *socially constructed* rather than *real*. Disability, then, can be attended to through change in the social environment of the student (Clark et al., 1998). This understanding of disability as socially constructed belongs within constructivist epistemology as described by Crotty (1998), and leads naturally to qualitative research.

Symbolic interactionism. Coined by Blumer (cited in Berg, 2004; see also section 3.2.3), this theoretical perspective is situated within constructivist epistemology, and derives from work on language and other symbolic systems initiated by Mead in the 1930's (Crotty, 1998; Stangvik, 1998). Interactions and the symbolic meanings attached to them form the basis for understanding social situations (Babbie, 2001).

3.2.3 Coalesced Paradigms - Implications for this research

In practice, positivism and interpretivism often overlap: Coleman and Lumby (1999) believe that much research is now conducted on a paradigm continuum with multiple overlaps, and Yin (2003b) points out that there is "strong and essential common ground between the two" (p.15) approaches. However, it is important to remember that each has a specific orientation or leaning which can create blind spots and result in weak and limited conclusions. A paradigm is by definition a limited world view, so no one paradigm can deal with all there is to understand. While this project is predominantly interpretivist in that it seeks perceptions, it aims to avoid dismissing the medical/biological and highly individualised needs of many students with

disabilities. People who are blind, Deaf or who live with physical disability know their problems are not all socially constructed.

Qualitative and quantitative methods. “Qualitative research refers to meaning, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things. In contrast, quantitative research refers to counts and measures of things” (Berg, 2004, p.3). In case study methodology, all data collection techniques, whether they are qualitative or quantitative, are acceptable (Berg, 2004; Yin, 2003b); the aim is to develop a cogent argument, which links the questions, data and conclusions in a final report. Yin cuts across the quantitative/qualitative dichotomy by recognising the terms as descriptors of data types rather than methodologies. In this way, both are seen as appropriate data collection procedures within a case study design. This mixed method approach is appropriate for an eclectic study as outlined later in this section.

Post-modernism. The post-modernists, notably Foucault and Derrida, have made it clear that knowledge and truth (reality) are not universal precepts (Babbie, 2001; Berg, 2004; Clark et al., 1998; Crotty, 1998; Rabinow & Rose, 2003). We no longer hope to find one solution or process that fits all. Diversity and uncertainty are fundamental. Post-modernism further challenges researchers to consider the role of possible power imbalances in the social situations they investigate and in their creation of knowledge about those social situations. Derrida points to the significance of what is omitted or ‘different’ wherein something is significant by its very absence (Crotty, 1998). We are challenged to consider the discourses leading to the tacit acceptance that something is unworthy of consideration, creating marginalisation or disappearance. This process of marginalising difference can be equally true of either paradigm. Special education systems can easily obscure rather than reveal the contradictions in education generally, by transferring system failures onto individual students (Booth, 1998). It is therefore important to acknowledge barriers erected within both paradigms.

The call to action. Many theorists (e.g. Clark et al., 1998) and practitioners believe that theory and practice must together develop, critically and reflectively, to a position where education is truly inclusive and equally beneficial to all students. With this mandate, research becomes less an end in itself and more a mode of empowerment and social improvement (Ainscow, 1998; Christenson et. al, 2002; Elliott, 1978; Schon, 1987; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere & Montie, 2001). Further, people with disabilities must not be considered as merely interesting subjects (Allan et al., 1998). Research can only be justified by benefiting those being researched (Snook, 2003) and researchers cannot justify the luxury of drawing conclusions in the mould of one or other paradigm. Further, recommendations cannot be viewed as simple universal

prescriptions; they should evolve from a dynamic interplay between the researcher and those being researched within specific contexts (Clark, Dyson & Millward, 1998).

Eclecticism. An *eclectic* approach acknowledges that disability is complex and supports Stangvik’s (1998) conviction that “research is in need of a multiplicity of perspectives” (p.138). This study then, attempts to describe how the participants perceive and reconcile the paradigm and ideological clashes they encounter. As neither paradigm is free from its tacit assumptions and therefore those things it marginalises or fails to notice, a post-modern approach will be adopted, attempting to keep both eyes open in a bid to report issues in explicit, transparent terms as well as to recognise significant absences. This will mean (a) incorporating both qualitative and quantitative technologies, (b) engaging in both insider and outsider investigatory tactics, (see following sections), (c) adopting an ecological stance which nevertheless does not seek to deny individual diagnosis and intervention, and (d) attempting a critique of the assumptions of both paradigms in order to avoid a kind of paradigm blindness which may limit the usefulness of the conclusions to the students at the centre of the enquiry.

The researcher recognises the provisional nature of her interpretations and attempts to enable readers to ‘see for themselves’ and come to their own conclusions. The potential for beneficial action drives this study, whether or not in the final analysis implications for practice are intrinsic to the student or social in their origin; positivist or interpretivist in their orientation.

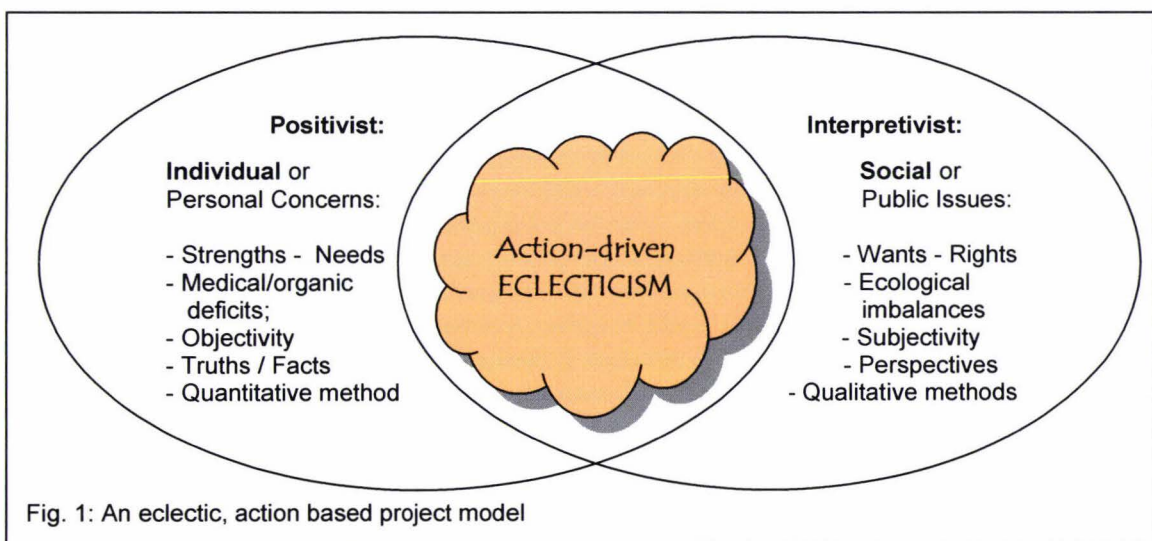


Fig. 1: An eclectic, action based project model

Figure 1 depicts this study as sitting within an *eclectic paradigm* derived from the coalescing of positivist and interpretivist orientations, where action is an imperative.

Symbolic interactionism. This theory informs the study with its strong emphasis on verbal and non-verbal communication, and personal interpretation. It contributes to post-modern and interpretivist understandings by providing a theoretical framework for uncertainty and diversity, reflecting also the underlying assumption that there are many realities and consequently many possible solutions to problems. The interactions of the participants and the meanings they each attach to those interactions will form the primary source of data, guide data analysis, underpin the findings and inform conclusions. There is a danger, however, in taking at face value socially accepted, but unproven concepts (Simpson, 1995), and in denying the existence of diagnoses and impairments; these form the foundation of important specialist interventions, enrich understandings of students and guide programme adaptations (Ballingall, Gardner & Nagel, 2000; Pagliano, 2002; Sigafos & Arthur, 2002; Whyte & Scratchley, 2000;). Berg (2004) and Gutek (2004) point out that within the diversity of meanings there are frequently patterns of understandings, processes and behaviours that can be observed. These patterns need to be clarified alongside the more positivist dimensions inherent in the notion of disability. A model (Fig.2) has been developed to marshal these patterns. This model will be described further in chapter four.

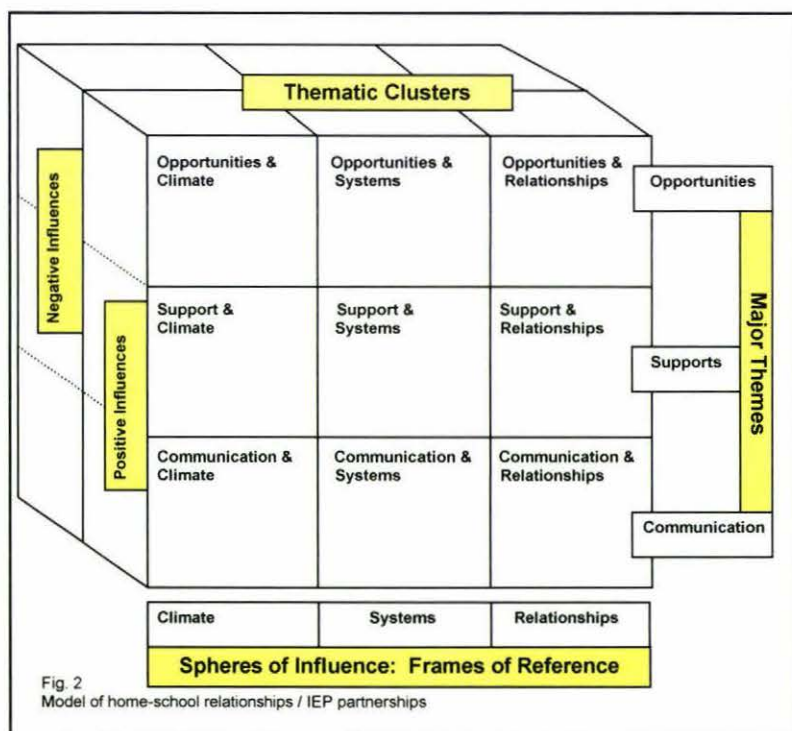


Figure 2 depicts the theoretical model developed for this study showing the pattern of events and perceptions related to home-school relationships and IEP partnerships. The model has been developed to marshal and give voice to the many perspectives, positive and negative, within this complex ecology.

3.3 CASE STUDY RATIONALE

3.3.1 Relationship to the Eclectic Model

Yin (2003b) sites case study within 'logical positivism' and describes case study design as an 'emulation of the scientific method' (p.163). Following his model, this study provides a logical structure by which readers can see a reasoned use of data, linking research questions - to design - to theory - to literature - to data backed by an extensive database comprising several collection methods and sources - to analysis - to conclusions. Data triangulation processes employed emphasise corroborated evidence. Conversely, this study also takes a respectful interpretative stance, as described by Crotty (1998), in presenting the stories of the 'few', 'lone voices' that add richness and diversity even though they may represent the only instance of a particular data point across all data types.

3.3.2 Why a Case Study Approach?

A single, intrinsic case study model was selected because it allowed for an in depth focus on *how* complex home-school interactions work (Bell, 1996; Denscombe, 2003). Further, the reliance on multiple sources of evidence, the lack of experimental control by the researcher and the contemporary focus on real-life events and processes, make this project an appropriate application for case study methodology (Berg, 2004; Gillham, 2000; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003a). Stake and Yin (2003a, 2003b) say it is important to define both the case and the context, although the boundaries may not always be very clear. The ecological models presented in the following section (Figs. 3 & 4) situate the case and its boundaries with other relationships and social factors that exist at school and in society at large: the context. The relationship matrix (Fig. 2) shows the patterns of analysis which define and justify home-school relationships as an identifiable entity and a valid candidate for case study.

This case study is primarily *intrinsic* and *descriptive* (Punch, 2001; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003a, 2003b), describing one New Zealand secondary school. However, because the study describes the linking processes between trends and themes, helping to understand *why* certain aspects of the process are more or less functional for the participants, it is also *explanatory*. Further, it is hoped to explore possible alternatives to current practices. In this sense the project will be *exploratory* and may serve as a pilot for further investigation (Berg, 2004; Yin, 2003b).

3.3.3 Case Study and the Role of Theory

The theoretical model guiding the content of this study is the *human ecological system* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hildebrand et al., 2000; Sontag, 1996). Bronfenbrenner also attested to the positive and negative dimensions of environments (Hildebrand et al., 2000; Sontag, 1996). This dichotomy is represented for each thematic cluster represented in Figures 2 and 5: the relationship matrix. The following two figures depict the ecological context of the present case.

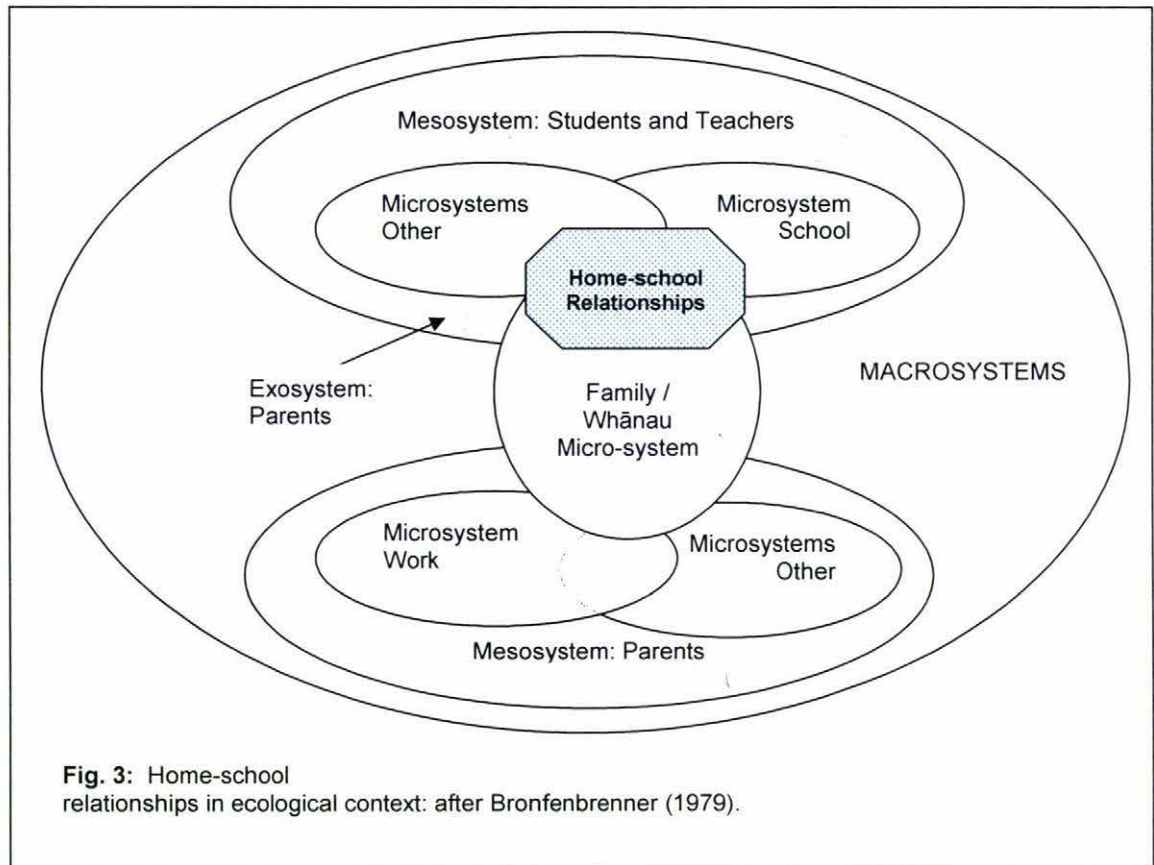


Figure 3 shows home-school relationships as having an ecological context within the mesosystems of both students and teachers. For the parents, this partnership is part of their exosystem, and is therefore less familiar to them than to the student or the teacher.

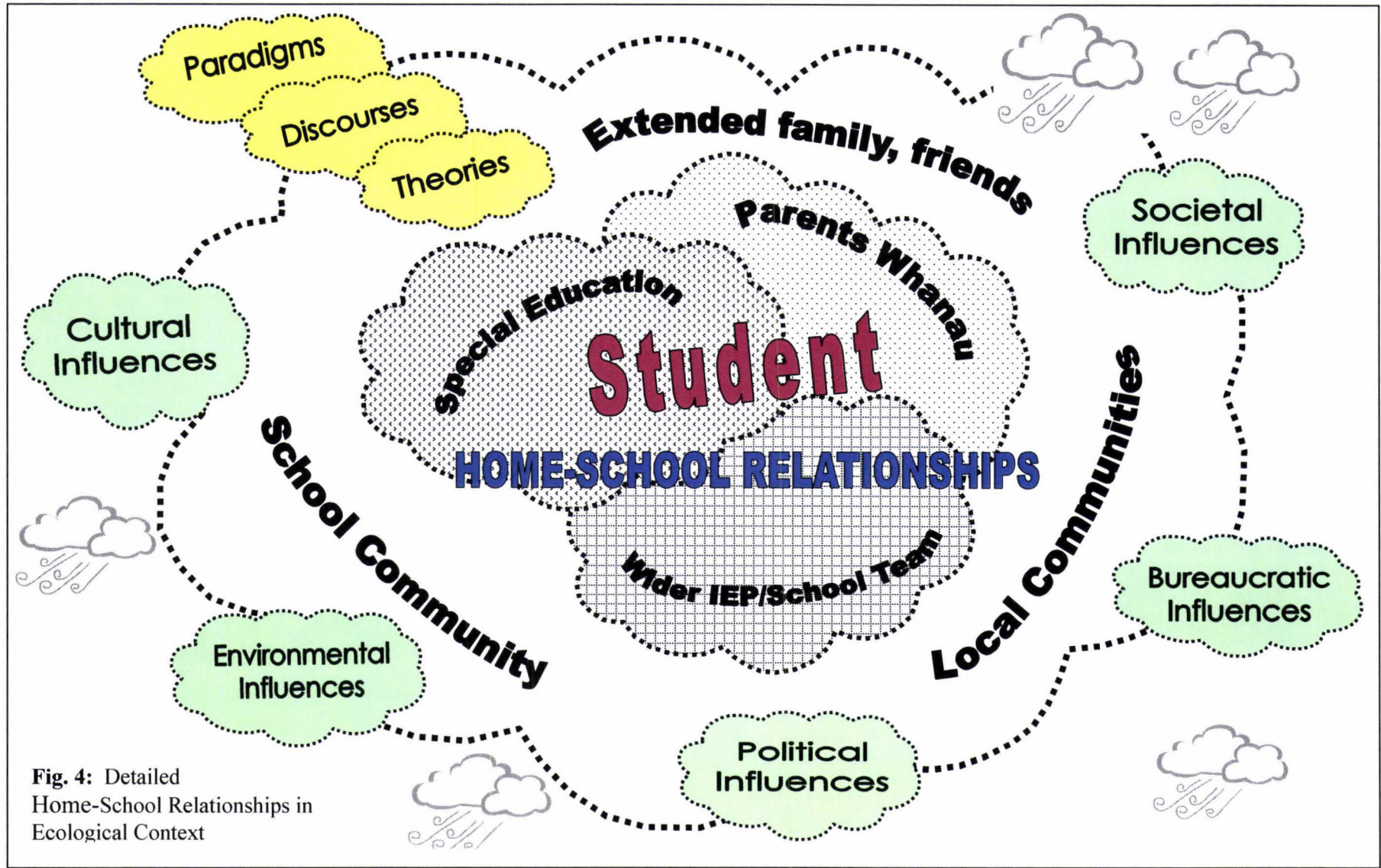


Fig. 4: Detailed Home-School Relationships in Ecological Context

Figure 4 depicts a more complex view of the ecological context of the case. As in figure 3, home-school relationships are sited at the overlap of three of the students' microsystems, now identified as those of immediate family, special education relationships, and their wider IEP processes. This team varies from student to student, but would generally include support staff, wider school staff and (less commonly) community members. Beyond the mesosystem relationships and partnerships are influenced by macrosystems: extended family/whānau/friendships, the school community, and the local community.

Further out in the exosystem is the presence of other influences: cultural, social, political and economic. However, because cultures vary and because individuals and their situations undergo frequent change, each entity within this ecology is depicted as bounded by amorphous, permeable filters representing systems as varied and permanently in a state of reconfiguration. These filters permit the entry of influences dependant on each person's constructions of the individual, family, school, community and society. Their realities are shown to be affected according to the dominant discourses, theories and paradigms in operation, as well as their cultural, personal and professional perspectives. The winds of change, shown as blowing across the ecosystem, add a serendipitous dimension and an impetus for beneficial development.

3.4 THE SETTING

This study was conducted over a six month period in 2004. The subject, 'Midland High' is a mid-decile co-educational secondary school, located in a central North Island city in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Midland is referred to by the principal and staff as a 'magnet school' for special education students and operates several programmes designed to meet the requirements of students with a diversity of special education and support needs.

The school caters for one of the largest groups of ORRS funded students in the country. It is a verified 'fundholder' school (MOE Manager Eligibility, personal communication, September 4, 2003), and manages the individualised funding for its ORRS students; most schools' ORRS funds are managed locally by the MOE. There is a large special education staff of seven teachers (five of whom were designated 'key' teachers for the ORRS students at the time of the study) and more than thirty support staff. Most staff were employed on a full time, permanent basis.

There are three special education centres and one learning support centre in the school, each catering for a sub-group of students with special learning needs. The centres are all at or near the school boundaries and three are reached most readily through a back entrance. The IEP meetings took place in five different rooms, each with specific advantages and disadvantages (see Chapter 4), within or near-by one or other of the centres.

3.4.1 The researcher's role

With case study methodology, it is important to maintain the dimensions of the natural setting (Denscombe, 2003) and thus unrealistic and undesirable to take the position of a complete outsider. As Glesne (1999) says, some observer-participant interaction is appropriate. As the head of department: special education at Midland High, key teacher and speech-language therapist for several of the participating students, a degree of participation was expected by parents, teachers and students, especially during the observation of IEP meetings.

Researcher participation and relationship to the context is less of a problem in a post-modern interpretative framework than in a positivist environment, which seeks to deny subjectivity in the quest for universal and impartial truths. Stake (1995) asserts that qualitative research "champions the interaction of researcher and phenomena" (p.95). While there were ethical snags in approaching this study as an 'insider' in an authority position (see Ethical Considerations, section 3.8), the staff, management, students and parents knew me and were very supportive. This also eliminated any potential access problems. Further, the potential for positive change was far greater than had the research taken place in another school. My years of experience and knowledge of the school and its families have enriched the report and aided me in my attempt to draw together the threads of each participant's subjective reality. Integrity, critical self analysis and supervisor support were therefore essential and integral aspects of the research.

An 'outsider's perspective' is useful in observations (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993; Berg, 2004; Bouma, 2001). This has been sought through the quantitative aspects of the study, triangulation of much of the data, and the thematic model which objectively marshals the participants' thoughts and interpretations. As a speech-language therapist and senior teacher, the researcher has considerable experience in both detached and participant observation.

3.4.2 The Participants

The students who participated in the study were receiving funding in addition to that of their peers through the Ministry of Education ORRS, and were accessing a mix of regular secondary school and special education opportunities. All forty ORRS funded students, their parents/caregivers and special education key teachers were invited to participate, in order to gain the broadest possible understanding of the relationships formed in this context.

Table 1

Overall participation

Invitations extended	Numbers accepting	Percentage accepting
40 Students	24	60
40 Families	24	60
5 Teachers	5	100

Table 1 shows the acceptance rate for participation in the study by the different groups. As can be seen, there were good acceptance rates.

Participants were invited to be involved in data collection procedures to the extent they were comfortable. Two Deaf students and one student with cerebral palsy were interviewed with assistance from support staff.

Table 2

Participation in data collection procedures

Procedure	Numbers accepting	Numbers completed	Percentage completed
Interviews	23 Students	23	100
	24 Families (1 or 2 parents)	24	100
	5 Teachers	5	100
IEP meeting observations	23 Teams (parents, teachers & students)	16	70
Logbook analysis	16 Books used regularly	13	81
IEP document analysis	24 Teams	24	100

Table 2 shows the data collection procedures participants chose to participate in and the completion rate of the procedures. Meetings which were not observed fell outside the research period or were subject to sudden unforeseen circumstances. The logbooks which were not analysed were not available on the days this procedure was carried out. The table shows that completion rates were high.

While all the students received funding through the ORRS scheme, they were not a homogeneous group. They had a variety of disabilities (deafness, intellectual and/or physical differences, visual impairments, autism spectrum disorders) and represented a mix of characteristics present in the general secondary school population (ethnicity, gender, ability), although, unlike their peers, they were as old as twenty-one years. The youngest was twelve. Some were in their first year at the school and some were preparing to leave. There was a spread across year levels.

Parents were asked to provide consent for their children's participation regardless of age or ability. In seven cases of severe intellectual disability, parents consented on behalf of their teenagers. In addition to these procedures, the principal and Board of Trustees chairperson consented to the use of school files and documents.

All students had assigned 'key' special education teachers who were responsible for coordinating their programmes, supporting regular class teachers, managing teacher aide support, providing specialist programmes as needed and facilitating the IEP processes for their assigned students. In addition, students received between eight and thirty hours of support staff assistance (teacher aides and communicators for the Deaf) each week, including in-class or community support, and/or attention to personal care needs. Most were attached to a special education centre and received additional support from centre staff. All but one student spent some of their day attending regular classes with their peers. Some students spent all day in regular classes. Several of the senior students were engaged in transition (work experience, community skills or tertiary education activities) which took them out of the school for part of the week.

While not all Midland's special education students are ORRS funded, only these students were included in the study. Students funded from different sources were managed according to the protocols of those provisions. Their inclusion would therefore make comparisons, and ultimately, conclusions and recommendations more complicated, although the themes and concerns may well be very similar. The ORRS students represent the students with the most significant special education needs (Mitchell, 2000); relationships between home and school are therefore the most complex and arguably have the greatest potential for improvement. Two of the ORRS students received additional support through ACC, but were resourced in the same manner as the ORRS students and therefore were included.

One special education teacher not involved in the research assisted with identifying and determining the significance of emerging themes. This collaboration increased the expansiveness of the endeavour, opening the researcher's eyes to neglected possibilities (Ainscow; 1998), and has added to the interpretive strength of the study. One parent, who was also a staff member, participated in a pilot interview. The pilot interview assisted in refining the interview process and determining appropriate directions of inquiry.

Ten of the participants (parents and students) identified as Māori. The remainder identified as European/Pakeha New Zealanders. Three of the parents interviewed were fathers, one was a step-mother, and the remainder were mothers. Three of the parents were employed in the school. To avert confusion about which group a particular participant belongs to, the pseudonyms used for each member of each participant group are provided in Appendix B.

3.5 METHODS: DATA COLLECTION

Most data collection and analysis procedures in this study employ qualitative methods informed by symbolic interactionism. However, the project was strengthened by the use of quantitative procedures in the analysis of IEP documents and student home-school logbooks and in the observation of IEP meetings. Numeric tables are displayed in chapter four where quantitative methods have been utilised.

The first step in the data collection process was to determine which data were necessary to answer the research questions (Punch, 2001). The data collection procedures were determined subsequent to these decisions irrespective of their relationship to the qualitative/quantitative dichotomy. As the purpose of the study was to determine how relationships within the IEP process work from the perspectives of those involved, firsthand information was needed from the parents, teachers and students involved. The data collected consisted of accounts of personal experience (interviews), supplemented by corroborating data gathered through analysis of various documents and direct observation.

3.5.1 Document Analysis

Document analysis was included in the study as it added several positive dimensions to the data (Creswell, 2002). The documents are authentic representations of what the participants think, feel and do, and in the case of policies, what they are expected to do; they represent more than just fleeting moments in the participant's thinking and in the case of previous IEP documents,

add a time dimension to the data. They also provide corroborative data to assist with triangulation. The documents analysed were

- school Policies, to determine how the school expects parents and whānau to be involved and how staff are expected to behave towards parents and whānau;
- previous IEP documents (plans, evaluations and minutes), to determine frequency of attendance by parents and others and frequency and type of parental contribution; and
- home/school diaries (logbooks), to determine the frequency and purpose of communication.

The analysis procedures are described in section 3.6. Data arrays are presented in chapter four.

3.5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Separate interview plans (they were not formal schedules) were developed for parents, teachers and students (see Appendix C for interview plans) based on the researcher's experience of the types of conversations that were likely to occur and initial reading on the research topic. The plans were conceptualised as three main interview foci, each aiming to develop specific aspects of the inquiry (Punch, 2001). The foci were wider school processes, IEP processes and the potential for change. A pilot interview was conducted, and the interviewee provided feedback about the focus and details of the plan. Modifications were made at this point, reducing the effect of the researcher's personal predispositions: a risk discussed by Stake (1995).

Most participants were interviewed individually, but twice two parents met together and once the family (both parents and the student) met together. Parents chose their interview venue. Eleven interviews took place in parents' homes and two at their places of work. One parent came to the researcher's home. All teachers, students and the remaining parents were interviewed in private rooms at the school. Support staff assisted students as deemed appropriate by the participants and researcher.

Following Denscombe's (2003) recommendations, interviews were premised by recapping the purpose of the study, participants' rights and confidentiality information. A statement was then made, clarifying the meaning of 'IEP process' (see Appendix C for interview plans), and participants were encouraged to ask questions at any time. Each focus area was prefaced with an introductory statement to 'set the scene', followed by a series of related questions or probes (Gillham, 2000) and prompts which assisted to maintain the flow of the interview (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Participants were not necessarily asked all questions, depending on the flow of the conversation, and depending on the interviewer's judgment of their ability to participate, as

in the case of students with intellectual disabilities. The questions acted rather as a checklist to ensure most areas of interest were covered over the course of the interview.

Each interview provided rich insights into the participant's views and experiences, probing into predetermined focus areas as well as recording the participant's own stories (Creswell, 2002; Denscombe, 2003; Gillham, 2000; Stake, 1995). To limit the degree of 'interviewer effect' as described by Creswell, attempts were made to develop participants' lines of thought, clarify inconsistencies, and check interviewer interpretations (Denscombe, 2003). Parent and teacher interviews lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes and student interviews between five and ten minutes. One student, Emma, was present at her parents' interview, and answered many of the parent oriented questions. As a result, her contribution was more in depth than that of her peers and she is quoted more frequently in the report.

Interviews with parents and teachers were recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the researcher into a researcher constructed database (using Microsoft Access), thus preserving the authenticity of the data (Denscombe, 2003). One parent opted not to be recorded. Responses (quotes and paraphrases) from this interview and those from students were written down as the participants spoke. Transcripts were made available to participants for review and editing purposes who then signed release of transcript consents (see Appendix D for consent documents). The transcript from the pilot interview was also included in the database.

3.5.3 Direct Observation

For various reasons, 16 of the possible 23 IEP meetings were observed; all but two of these were observed in their entirety. Circumstances meant it was not possible to observe all the meetings. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed to complete the observations.

Altrichter et al. (1993) and Berg (2004) assert that observations can become too diffuse and details lost. The observations, therefore, were quite narrowly focused and a protocol (see Appendix E for observation documents) was developed to ensure similar data was collected at each meeting, based on the researcher's experience of the types of contributions parents typically make at meetings. Researcher developed protocols are consistent with this kind of research (Creswell, 2002; Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

In particular the observation protocol included a description and diagram of the physical setting, details of participant activity immediately prior to the meeting, and the frequency, length and type of parent and student contributions. Utterances were tallied when parents or students asked or answered questions, agreed, challenged or disagreed with other team members, asserted opinions, or when they undertook responsibility for some aspect of the IEP programme. 'Descriptive' and 'reflective' comments as suggested by Creswell (2002) were also made during the observations. Comments included the nature of greetings and general chat prior to and immediately following the meetings, the non-verbal behaviour of the participants, interruptions, length and timeliness of meetings, and the general climate.

Following each meeting, a checklist on the proceedings, adapted from Salend (1998), was also completed (Appendix E for observation documents). Further comments were also made directly following observations as recommended by Gillham (2000). This approach combines the advantage of 'on the spot' recording with the ease and reflective opportunities of recording immediately after the event (Altrichter et al., 1993).

3.5.4 Memos

Memos became, in effect, the research 'journal' (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993; Creswell, 2002). The memos, which recorded reflections, insights, and tentative analytical connections, were maintained chronologically with annotations referenced to the data or relevant literature (Examples of memos are displayed in Appendix F). As themes developed and possible explanations emerged, reflecting on previous entries and recording new ideas assisted in maintaining tight, logical and consistent links between the concepts, the research questions and the data (Punch, 2001).

Interviews. Some (very few) descriptive and reflective notes were made as the interviews proceeded; listening seemed the most important task. It was not until immediately afterwards, or during the transcription, that most of these memos were generated; many related to possible themes, interpretations, connections between interviews and relationships to literature or theory. Some focused on non-verbal and contextual aspects of the interview, which assisted in later interpretation of the words transcribed (Creswell, 2002; Denscombe, 2003). This was the first stage of data analysis.

Observations. Memos written during and immediately following observations were intrinsic to the data collection process and were retained with the raw data for each observation.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of analysis is to shape the data into various themes, issues and categories that effectively address the research question and its sub-questions (Punch, 2001; Stake, 1995, 2000).

3.6.1 Database

Bogdan and Bicklen (1998) recommend analysis commence on day one of the project with the development of a robust database. The database for this study includes complete collections of each data type, chronological descriptive and reflective memos and extensive excerpts from, and references to, relevant research and professional literature. The overall strategy behind maintaining a database is to form as complete a case description as possible (Yin, 2003b) within the limitations of the time frame and selected tools. A problem with qualitative research is the enormity of the data collected (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Data collections, therefore, must be well managed (Yin, 2003b). For this study, all data and memos have been organised logically in an accessible format to facilitate deeper analysis (Berg, 2004) as they have been collected, transcribed and tidied.

3.6.2 Criteria

An important component of a case study is the establishment of clear “criteria for shaping and interpreting the findings” (Yin, 2003b, p.21). There were several criteria established for this study:

- Establish important and recurring themes or patterns through trialling different coding systems, and maintaining rigorous processes.
- Ensure all evidence is taken into account by coding all responses and integrating all data collections. As a sense of serendipity and the institutionalised processes of omission could mask aspects of marginalisation, the absence of evidence or participant concern will also be noteworthy at times during data analysis and interpretation.
- Ensure competing interpretations are considered and included through reflection (based on professional skill, knowledge and experience), colleague assistance and literature search.
- Ensure analysis and interpretation is guided by the symbolic meanings attached to interactions by the participants themselves, placing the greatest emphasis on what the participants say and how they behave, while acknowledging factual information regarding individual disability and the quantitative data collected.

- Ensure conclusions are logically and tightly linked, step by step, to the research questions and stated aims of the study. Where individual participant's perceptions can be seen to correspond they can be melded to reach general conclusions (Stake, 2000).

3.6.3 Reflection

Stake (2000) says the essence of qualitative case study is reflection:

In being ever reflective, the researcher is committed to pondering the impressions, [and] deliberating recollections and records...Local meanings are important; foreshadowed meanings are important; and readers' consequential meanings are important. The case researcher teases out meanings of these three kinds (p.445).

However, researcher biases are recognised; information is 'filtered' through the views of the interviewer. Further, semi-structured interviews and observations produce non-standard responses (Denscombe, 2003), making analysis highly subjective, a point reiterated by McWilliam (2000). Critical and rigorous reflection, then, is essential to the analysis process and has been attended to through extensive recording of reflective memos, iteration between the data and current literature, and deep immersion in the data. Peer review of the initial design and a pilot interview assisted to broaden the reflective process.

3.6.4 Process

A scheme for mechanically working with the data once it is collected needs to be planned (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1998; Gillham, 2000). Data must be collapsed from many pages of text to just a few themes (Creswell, 2002) which represent patterns within the data (Stake, 2000). Gillham recommends a standard sequence for analysing interview data (see Appendix G for the data analysis summary). This process formed the basis of analysis. In addition the data reduction phase of the process was augmented by Creswell's (2002) recommendations:

- Divide text into segments of information: An initial eight segments were used, which related to aspects of the inquiry. These were wider-school processes; special education processes; IEP processes – before, during and in between meetings; change factors; overall or global statements; and other comments
- Label segments with codes: Thirty-six codes were used initially (see Appendix H for data analysis codes).
- Reduce overlap: Codes were reduced to twenty-five by merging overall relationship and partnership factors because the participants did not make these distinctions and integrating change factors into each of the other sections.

- Collapse codes into themes: At this point themes began to emerge across codes. With colleague review, new themes also emerged, so the codes were reconceptualised as nine clusters of themes (See Figs.2 & 5), which encapsulated the ideas presented in each segment of the inquiry.

Data from observations and document analysis (both qualitative and quantitative) were also arranged within the thematic clusters of the relationship matrix. Yin (2003b) presents matrix analysis as an appropriate method for analysis of case study data.

Triangulation. The triangulation of key issues and bases for interpretation is an important aspect of case study analysis (Stake, 2000). Each data collection was analysed and interpreted in conjunction with other sets of data and the literature (Gillham, 2000; Punch, 2001). In the findings (Chapter 4) these multiple sources of data are recorded and convergence or divergence noted (see also Validity, section 3.7).

There are also events that bring meaning, but which occur only once or just a few times. These are also significant (Stake, 1995) and belong in the weave of the case, so long as the criteria for analysis are adhered to and the purpose of the study advanced by their inclusion. Lone voices and the absence of voice on some issues are included in the interpretation.

Quantitative analysis. Counts of various kinds of events and interactions were made during observations and document analysis. These are woven into the case to support the qualitative data and are presented in chapter four.

3.7 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

3.7.1 Internal Validity

Triangulation of converging evidence (Bell, 1996; Berg, 2004) from data sources (document analysis, interviews and direct observation), methods (qualitative and quantitative) and perspectives (parents, teachers, students and supervisors) provided internal validity for this study. Triangulation reduces the risk of one method or perspective (including that of the researcher) invalidating the study with its particular limitations (Denscombe, 2003; Yin, 2003a, 2003b). The analysis of previous IEP documents provides a longitudinal dimension to the data.

Internal validity is further enhanced by ensuring the methods selected are appropriate, rigorously and systematically applied (Berg, 2004), and the questions asked in fact elicit answers to the stated research questions. Robust justification of the research methodology has been provided in previous sections. Findings are reported in as great a detail and diversity as possible to enable readers to make further connections or dispute the researcher's conclusions, armed with all the important information at the disposal of the researcher. The input from colleagues, who reviewed aspects of the design and analysis, provides further validation of the research process and findings, and a strong overall picture of IEP partnerships at Midland High can be seen to emerge.

3.7.2 Construct Validity

Multiple sources of evidence and establishing a chain of evidence are important aspects of construct validity (Yin, 2003b). A chain of evidence is developed through the logical steps of the study. Pattern matching and explanation building are carried out within a defined model and clearly stated theory about what the case actually is. These strategies assist to maintain the rigour of the study (Yin, 2003a, 2003b) an important element in achieving a valid description. In this study, data is addressed in each of the sequential chapters under related headings to enable the reader to trace the origin of each conclusion or recommendation.

3.7.3 External Validity

The results are not generalisable because of the project's open ended data gathering approaches, its small scale and the complexity of the processes under investigation (Bell, 1996). However, the case is described in enough depth to provide *comparability*, allowing informed judgments to be made about how far the findings have relevance to other secondary schools (Denscombe, 2003). The literature search, which positions the study within existing knowledge and illuminates both its commonality and divergence from the wider context in which it sits, assists with external validation (Berg, 2004; Yin, 2003b). Yin also recommends the use of theory and this is presented in an earlier section of this chapter to position the study within existing theoretical frameworks.

3.7.4 Reliability

The idiosyncratic impact of the researcher, the context (the researcher's own work place) and the open-ended nature of some aspects of the data collection make objectivity and consistency difficult to achieve. The data will therefore be unique and exact replication impossible, creating a negative effect on reliability (Denscombe, 2003). Stake (2000, p.443) notes that "ambiguity and the championing of multiple perspectives" is to be expected in an era of constructivism; however, the procedures used are described fully and accurately so that the project could be repeated, if not replicated. Regular critical review by project supervisors has been sought at all stages of the research process. This has helped to minimise researcher bias and error. As recommended by Yin (2003b), an extensive case study database has been collected, compiled and maintained throughout the study and analysis has followed the procedures described accurately and honestly (Bouma, 2001), further increasing reliability.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All aspects of this study were developed in accordance with Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct (2004) guidelines and were structured in full cognisance of the researcher's close connection to the setting. Consent documents, including information/information letters and confidentiality agreements, can be viewed in Appendix D. The thesis was approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Application 04/74).

Access to the Site. Permission to access the site, personnel and school documents was obtained in writing from the Board of Trustees chairperson and the principal.

Voluntary Informed Consent. This was obtained from students, parents and special education teachers. An information letter was also developed and posted to all potential participants along with invitations to participate and consent forms. Care was taken in formulating invitations to ensure participants understood they were under no obligation and could participate in any or all aspects of the research to the extent they were comfortable, without prejudice to any existing relationship. Although many students were over fifteen years, parental consent was sought for all students because of the vulnerability of students with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities. Where practicable, students also signed their own consents.

The researcher's relationship to the teachers created an ethical problem. It was considered important not to put pressure on potential participants, so no direct approaches were made by

the researcher. A member of the school administration team contacted potential participants to clarify any procedural matters that arose and also handled all initial processing of consent procedures.

Protection of Rights and Interests of Participants. The information sheet assured participants that they were at liberty to ask any questions, to abstain from any particular aspect of the research and to withdraw at any time without prejudice to any existing relationship (Berg, 2004; Denscombe, 2003). A further safeguard was the treatment of interview data. Participants had access to their draft transcripts and only approved transcripts were included in the data.

Truthfulness. Throughout this study, I have maintained a truthful approach to all dealings with the participants and in the presentation of all material. The representations of opinion and perspective which constitute the bulk of this report are recounted accurately and truthfully (Snook, 2003), and purposefully, with the criteria of beneficial advancement paramount at all times. Information letters (see Appendix D for consent documents) provided participants with accurate information regarding the research.

Sensitivity. All matters have been approached with participant privacy in mind. As far as possible I have endeavoured to be sensitive to the needs, wishes and preferences of each participant regarding where they wished to meet and how they wished interviews and observations to be conducted. Participants were informed of their right to only participate in procedures with which they were comfortable and to decline to answer, or have deleted, any response they wished.

Confidentiality. Anonymity of the research site is not possible in this project, but participants were assured that they would not be identified individually in the report and that data would be kept private and secure (Berg, 2004; Snook, 2003). Data will be destroyed after five years. Individual identity will remain confidential with access restricted to the project supervisors and the researcher (Denscombe, 2003). Others with any access to information, such as Deaf communicators, teacher aides and colleague assistants signed confidentiality agreements.

Potential for Harm. Because of my relationship to the context, a degree of researcher participation was inevitable and integral to this study (Crotty, 1998; McWilliam; 2000) and has been described earlier. It participants were reassured that their responses would be treated with complete discretion and would not affect any aspect of existing relationships. Findings are

reported in general terms with no criticism attributable to individuals. Data is only used for the purpose for which it was collected and in no way employed to disadvantage any participant.

In addition, teachers are well used to critical self-review and department evaluation as these activities form part of the annual cycle of review in the school. They are required to make constructive criticisms of the department, their own and head of department practices as part of these reviews. It is likely then, that they will be comfortable sharing their thoughts on the specific research questions, especially as the research has significant potential to identify potential improvements. Potential inconvenience and time commitment were also noted and participants were gratefully acknowledged individually and publicly in a department newsletter.

Quality Research: Potential Benefits. Unless research is of a high standard and contributes to existing knowledge, the potential for disruption to the participants can not be justified (Berg, 2004; Snook, 2003). For this reason a meticulous endeavour has been made to produce work of a high standard. The work was undertaken within the researcher's field of expertise and was overseen by experienced and qualified supervisors. Through the report findings, participants can be expected to gain a greater insight into the relationships they develop around students' schooling and transition into adult life, and to increase their understandings of the process from the perspectives of others. There is also a strong potential to improve existing practice to the benefit of teachers, students and whānau. It is hoped the findings will provide the basis for discussion and action within the school.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has traced the evolution of this thesis from its theoretical underpinnings to the details of the setting, data collection and analysis procedures as well as the researcher's unique role in the study. Further, it has described and provided rationale for the directions taken, described the measures taken to validate the study and provide comparability within the body of knowledge to which it contributes. Specific limitations and ethical implications resulting from the decisions taken are presented and discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the findings from each data type (documents, interviews, observations) and participant group (24 parents, 5 special education key teachers, and 23 students) will be presented as they relate to relationships with the wider-school and to the IEP partnerships. Findings will be marshalled into the theoretical model introduced in chapter two, in order to examine thematic *patterns* and give voice to the *diversity* of perception within the complex home-school ecology. The findings will be presented in a connected style, with information relating to each cluster of themes from all data sources and participant groups incorporated into a unified description covering (a) what happens in relation to different aspects of the participants' home-school relationships, (b) whether participants' experiences were positive, and (c) whether they had concerns or encountered problems. In line with a post-modernist approach, clustering mini-themes in this way allows more perspectives to be rallied and given voice than would occur in a more reductionist model. Because parental involvement is closely linked to student participation and many parents linked their own satisfaction directly to that of their children, the students' opinions and experiences are often reported even though they talk in general terms about their own satisfaction and not specifically about that of their parents.

Where participants have made suggestions regarding issues, these are presented at the end of the appropriate section. However, suggestions were not made for all clusters. Further, where no results are presented for a particular participant group or data type there were none; each interview and collection method emphasised different aspects of the case and each group of participants, indeed each participant, had different stories to tell, resulting rather in a patchwork of findings. Interviews provided the bulk of the data for this study (52 were held), so unless stated otherwise, findings are the result of interview transcript analysis. Only special education teachers were interviewed for this study, so unless stated otherwise, the term 'teacher' alludes to this group and not teachers in general. Where a distinction is needed, the terms 'wider-school teacher', 'regular' or 'class teacher' are used. While descriptors such as 'a few', 'several', and 'most' are employed to allow the description to flow, an indication of the numbers involved are provided at times in order to give the reader a sense of the meaning the author attaches to these terms.

4.2 THE RELATIONSHIP MATRIX

As the interview transcripts were reviewed, firstly within sections, and secondly across the sections, as described in chapter three, it became clear that participants were describing similar interrelated themes (or sub-themes) in each section of the data.

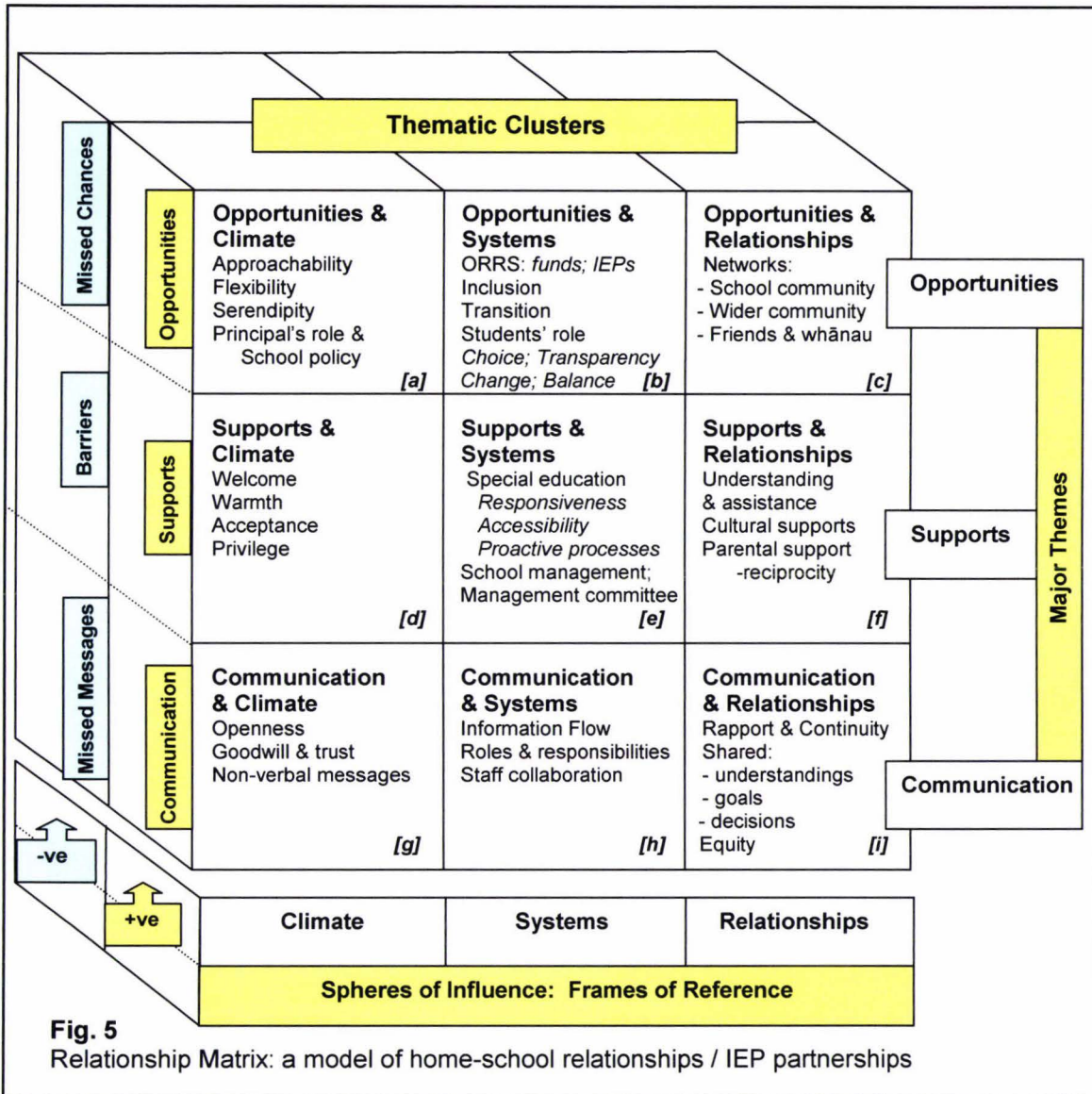


Figure 5 expands the three dimensional model presented in chapter three (Fig. 2). It illustrates how the sub-themes could be clustered and subsumed within three major themes: (a) *opportunities* for developing and maintaining relationships; (b) *supports* which are recognised as assisting to develop and maintain these relationships; and (c) the form, function and effectiveness of various modes of *communication*. Further, in describing parental relationships with the school, participants' perspectives appeared to be dominated by three major influences: (a) school *climate*; (b) *systems* within and external to the school, including families/whānau, political and social systems; and (c) individual *relationships* formed with teachers, school

managers or people from outside the school. The resulting conceptualisation is presented as a matrix of nine *thematic clusters*. Each thematic cluster can also be thought of possessing a third dimension, in that each poses counterbalancing perceptions: *positive* and *negative*.

4.3 OVERALL POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS

4.3.1 Positive Perceptions: The Power of Goodwill

Overwhelmingly (22), parents commented positively on the school atmosphere, organisation and general attitude towards themselves and their children, particularly within special education. Many used superlatives to describe their overall experience, as descriptors extracted from eight different interviews illustrate: “wonderful”, “nothing short of miraculous”, “excellent”, “an eye opener...we’d never had the support before”, “the whole thing – she’s in her zone”, “no problems whatsoever”, “she loves school”, “awesome - they tell you everything”. Joanne, the mother of a year nine student summed up the feeling of many parents.

I don't see any problems with anything, because it's just been, ‘Sit down and talk about it’... It’s just been well organised. We've had a really good positive start.

While most parents had experienced some problems, they felt these concerns were able to be resolved through goodwill, good organisation and communication. Good systems and supportive school management were also seen by most parents and teachers as critical.

The teachers all felt a range of opportunities and supports were available to the parents through special education. However, to the teachers, positive relationships between parents and the wider-school were dependent on (a) the positive attitude towards students with disabilities of individual class teachers and teaching departments who were willing to learn about students’ individual needs and to try new approaches, and (b) the general school climate which teachers saw as very open and welcoming of students with disabilities and diverse learning needs. As Leanne said, “Otherwise we wouldn’t have such a number.”

The students were all positive overall about school opportunities, communication and support. They were generally pleased when their parents were involved at school, and found this involvement helpful. They felt that school, on the whole, was ‘cool’. Two students were not able to answer direct questions, but their responses to their parents’ presence in the school were described as very positive by teacher aides in close contact with them. Students suggested very few changes.

4.3.2 A Negative to Balance Every Positive

Despite a generally positive perception, each parent identified areas which they believed should be improved in relation to one or more of the nine thematic clusters identified in Figure 5. In addition, they identified conundrums that appeared to them to have no immediate solution; negative attitudes and/or limiting practices were seen to be in play, in conjunction with positive dimensions of the same phenomena. Many parents had encountered systemic problems to which they were largely prepared to adopt long term or philosophic approaches; they were tolerant of the school's shortcomings.

We can't change some things. Other things take the whole school life of a child to change, so we have to work within the structures we have (Martha, parent).

I don't even think [inclusion] can happen at high school, because it can only happen in certain circumstances in the real world (May, parent).

You can be nit-picky. You've got to look at it in the big picture and we're getting to where we want to be most of the time; most of what happens, we like (Richard, parent).

The teachers' also identified several areas that called for improvement. Among the problems identified by at least one teacher were those related to the flow of information, uncertainty about roles and responsibilities, limitations of the IEP process, school systems and teacher knowledge and attitudes towards disability.

Students also identified some problems and concerns, including their sometimes limited range of subject choices, teachers' limited awareness of their needs, and their desire to be heard equally along with their parents and teachers. Two students saw a potentially negative side to parental involvement at school. They felt exposed.

Everyone comes to know what is going on (Emma, student).

4.4 THEMES

4.4.1 Opportunities/Missed Chances

Opportunities are defined as those aspects of the setting which provide chances for the development and maintenance of relationships and partnerships and which provide the backdrop enabling specific supports to be implemented and communication to occur.

Teachers, parents and students identified several similar opportunities for parents to form relationships with staff and be involved in school activities. Almost all parents (22) and teachers (4) believed parents of ORRS funded students had the same opportunities to be involved in the wider-school as any other parent and it was a matter of choice whether they became involved or not. Parents and teachers also noted the additional opportunities afforded by the IEP process. Most students were content with opportunities available to them, and many were highly enthusiastic.

4.4.1.1 Thematic Clusters: Opportunities

[a] Opportunities and Climate. Parents had a strong sense of affect within the school. The collective perceptions of these affects amount to the school *climate*. In this section the school climate is presented as it was perceived to enhance or reduce opportunities for parent and whānau involvement.

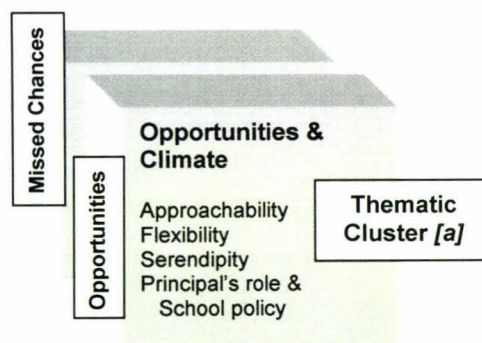


Fig. 6

Figure 6 illustrates the sub-themes within this cluster, which are

- approachability, the degree to which parents could approach the school and individuals within the school;
- flexibility, the extent of school's ability to accommodate individual needs and aspirations
- serendipity, the feelings of lucky chance used to explain events and outcomes; and
- the principal's role and school policy, the degree to which the principal and school policy 'set the scene' for parental involvement.

Approachability. All parents and teachers believed parents could approach special education teachers, the principal and management staff about any issue. Further, all participants gave glowing reports of the atmosphere in the special centres and the approachability of other special education staff who, parents felt, would make themselves available if at all possible. No parent felt constrained to wait for formal meetings to introduce concerns. Large numbers of diary entries verified this point. During observations, several parents were seen to approach staff and students freely while they waited for their IEP meetings. All teachers believed that very few problems arose for parents or students because, within this culture of approachability, all matters could be managed before they became problems.

If the parents want to be involved they can and the door is never shut on them and we're sort of open all hours for them (Elaine, teacher).

Missed Chances: Problems with Approachability.

1. It was difficult for new parents (3) and some established parents (3) to connect with school personnel, because they didn't know the staff names and were unclear how the system of support staff worked. Staff did not regularly sign their diary entries, making it difficult for parents to know who was working with their child.

2. Most (19) parents believed they could approach wider-school teachers if necessary. However, when it came to individual teachers or departments, the sense of approachability experienced by students and families was seen to vary considerably. Further, when a wider-school matter was to be dealt with, almost all parents said they made initial approaches through special education staff. It was evident that most parents in fact, had very little or nothing to do with the wider-school. Several (7 parents & all teachers) identified limited approachability as a barrier to involvement in the wider-school; some wider-school teachers and subject departments were seen as less approachable and more rigid in their attitudes to parents and students with disabilities.

[Some are] not nearly as welcoming to go anywhere near. You feel there are [only] little spaces and times when you can go ... you can't pop in and see how they are doing. This would be good for vulnerable kids (Jacqui, parent).

It's like another town; we visit it (Cathryn, parent & staff).

The wider-school seems to abdicate responsibility to special education...We are one step removed (Kate, parent & staff).

Twelve of the students said that their parents never, or very rarely, had anything to do with the wider-school. Another seven said their parents' only involvement was to attend parent-teacher interviews. Teachers all agreed this pattern existed but felt that limited approachability was a feature of secondary school culture generally, affecting all parents, not just those of students with disabilities.

I don't know [but maybe] parents feel it's a domain they don't really go into. But I think that would be the same for most parents, not just special needs parents. As a parent myself, I never felt I could just go and wander into their high school any time I wanted (Jenny, teacher).

Participant Suggestions.

The parents who mentioned wider-school approachability variously suggested (a) a more open door approach throughout the school - not just the principal, senior staff or special education staff - including access to classrooms; (b) more 'real' inclusion not just 'token'; and (c) more wider-school promotion of disabilities and how to support special needs. One parent mentioned the dual situation of being Māori and having a disability needed addressing.

Flexibility. There was a strong sense from all participants that the IEP meeting was just one part of an overall partnership between special education staff and parents, which was active throughout the year. Most parents (16) mentioned there was flexibility to review plans and consider alternatives at any time throughout the year if objectives had been completed or they were not working out.

That's the whole purpose of having meetings and staying in touch with the people who are educating her...People within our meetings are quite flexible [in] thinking what suits Macey best out of all our ideas (Tipene, parent).

The efforts of many individual wider-school teachers and specific teaching departments were also mentioned by quite a few parents and all the special education teachers, who appreciated both their professional commitment and their personal flexibility in providing flexible programmes and individual tuition.

Observations showed that meetings were almost always quite informal with a flexible conversational style. Parents were able to add items for discussion whenever they wished. The agenda appeared to be agreed tacitly, or suggested by the teacher and hurriedly agreed to by parents on the spur of the moment. A few (4) parents mentioned that they appreciated teachers'

flexibility with scheduling meetings to accommodate their needs. All teachers said they tried to be flexible in this regard, “within reason” (Jenny, teacher).

Missed Chances: Problems with Flexibility.

1. A few of the teachers and one parent felt wider-school teachers and departments focussed on teaching ‘subjects’ rather than teaching ‘students’ (Kate, parent & staff) and missed many opportunities to adopt a flexible approach with individual students.
2. All the teachers felt an MOE requirement for small measurable objectives or other regulations constrained the teams’ flexibility to determine what to focus on and how to evaluate, especially for the older transition students.

I think sometimes [the objectives] are meeting the Ministry needs rather than meeting student needs. [They are] too small, too Ministry orientated...To put what’s important for them into a little square isn’t [satisfactory]... You are doing huge things over here, but here is this nice little one objective that you can say achieved or not achieved at the end of it (Renee, teacher).

Participant Suggestions.

1. All teachers wanted greater flexibility to plan and evaluate in ways that they judged appropriate, rather than performing tasks for the benefit of the MOE. A solution which allowed a focus on wider goals was a ‘summary sheet’, developed by the teachers to work around the Ministry mandate. The summaries did not detail specific objectives, but allowed for broader teaching strategies and more general goals; they described goals but did not quantify them.
2. A sizeable group of teachers and parents felt increased professional development would help some wider-school teachers and departments to demonstrate greater flexibility in their teaching and their expectations for students with disabilities.

Serendipity (happy chance). Almost all parents reported that they believed their children were happy and safe at school. Almost all students (21) also indicated they liked school and were happy. Some parents believed that through experience they had developed strength to fight for what they needed to achieve these levels of satisfaction, and the wisdom to know how to go about it. Some felt their own dogged personality ensured success for their children. Others mentioned improved school cultures and systems, and outstanding individuals who had helped them. However, many parents and some teachers also made comments indicating they felt chance was a strong factor in successful outcomes; they felt lucky in their choices or situations. These participants took a serendipitous view. Chance meetings, lucky

realisations, fortunate placements in certain classes, happy combinations of support staff and students all played a part. While some parents felt they could analyse why things worked well and also why they didn't, many circumstances remained undefined by most parents and students; chance was seen to play a sizeable part in how things had worked out.

I'm lucky. I'm the fortunate one (Marlene, parent).

I have always been lucky with school (Sheena, parent).

I have always been lucky enough to resolve problems (Susan, parent).

I have been lucky, but I know where you are coming from with that question (May, parent).

I am lucky with my parents (Leanne, teacher).

Missed Chances: Problems with Serendipity.

1. Leaving things to chance meant important opportunities could be overlooked. For example, one parent pointed out that, "It is not a perfect world and the IEP only covers what those of us present think to bring to it" (Marlene).
2. Many parents and two of the teachers who said they had established mutually supportive relationships indicated there was a degree of serendipity in their relationships, which some believed made the outcomes less certain for other parents.
3. A serendipitous outlook could also make it difficult to analyse the relationship. For example, one parent said many improvements had occurred over the years, but she couldn't recommend any more because, "Changes often evolve just by chance, rather than because you think what would be better" (Murial, parent).

Principal's role and school policy. The principal's role was central and fundamental to the opportunities provided by the school according to many parents (10) and teachers (3) and one student. Both the current and previous principal (there was a new principal appointed just prior to the commencement of this study) were seen as approachable, flexible in allowing programme variations, and supportive if issues arose. Several (8) parents said they considered opportunities to meet and form relationships with the principal important in establishing approachability as a valued principle for "setting the tone" (Richard, parent) in the school. Emma (student) identified the principal's role in "stepping forward and owning" her as providing important opportunities. The principal's practice of sending birthday greetings to

each student in the whole school, along with an invitation to meet him personally was particularly appreciated.

That amazes me... it was a really, easily accessible sort of way. Not just, “come and say ‘giddy.’” You had a reason to, because it was her birthday (Joanne, parent).

The principal is the key. At Freyberg we trust the principal (Martha, parent).

The Board of Trustees also played an important role. They generated the policy to underpin the framework within which opportunities for strong home-school relationships could be developed. Together the school policies and guiding documents revealed a commitment to communication and partnership with parents/caregivers and whānau and community agencies, and provided the authority needed to make beneficial changes.

- The Statement of Objectives and Service Performance states a guiding principle, “He toi matauranga, he mana tangata: Innovates, cares, excels.” It also asserts that the school has a commitment to “improving management systems, processes, procedures and operating structures.”
- The Learning Support policy states that partnerships with parents/ caregivers and whānau are to be “encouraged and respected.”
- The Special Education policy requires staff to “actively work at promoting a partnership between students’ families and education providers.”
- The Fundholding policy indicates a commitment to fundholding for ORRS students.
- Special Education Management Committee: Learning Support policy states that special education leaders in the school would “report regularly to the Management Committee and to the BOT” (see Appendix A for school policies).

Missed Chances: Problems with Policy.

1. The Learning Support policy ensures special education staff work equitably within their own faculty and will give wider-school teachers as “much assistance and support as possible” (see Appendix A). There is no indication in the policy, however, of the responsibilities of the wider-school teachers in regards to students with disabilities (see also cluster [h]).
2. There is no policy which ensures students are placed in classes that accommodate their social needs, their physical requirements or personal preferences (see also cluster [e]).

3. There is no policy which provides a role for the Special Education Management Committee other than to receive reports. There is no indication what they may do with the reports or how they might go about promoting improvements (see also cluster [b]).

[b] Opportunities and Systems. A number of school-based processes or systems which operated could be seen as enhancing or limiting opportunities for students and parents to advance their personal and academic endeavours.

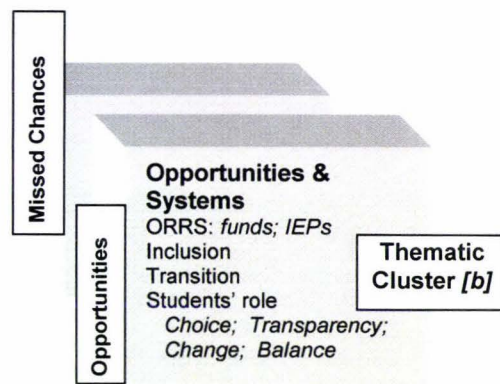


Figure 7 illustrates the processes or systems that were identified:

- ORRS Fundholding, with a primary requirement being the IEP process;
- inclusion/integration, student/parent participation in the wider functions of the school;
- transition, practices related to moves into and out of high school and moves between various centres and staff within the school; and
- the students' role both in accessing opportunities for themselves as well as their interaction with their parents regarding school matters.

Fig. 7

The recurring themes affecting opportunity within these systems were *transparency*, or the extent to which parents were made aware of systems and processes; *choice* within each system; and *balance*, particularly the balance between special and regular educational opportunities and balance between parents' and students' opportunities. The role of developing independence in the teenager is also significant within each of these systems. *Change* is seen as a major force, particularly within transition processes. Each of these sub-themes will be reported, where applicable, in relation to the identified systems.

ORRS fundholding: Funds management. Once the school management had set a budget, ORRS funds were managed within the special education department. The ORRS provision was closely monitored, with the school reporting each term to the MOE (MOE, 2004c; M. Parkin, personal communication, September 4, 2003).

Choice. Overwhelmingly, this system was seen to provide the greatest opportunities and range of choices for parents and teachers of any of the previous systems they had encountered. All teachers and all parents who discussed the issue (16) felt the school was more flexible in its use of monies and more responsive to the changing needs of the students than would be the case if money was managed by the MOE. For example, parents and students could choose from a range of transition activities. They also felt the school achieved exceptionally good value for money. The one student who commented (Emma) was strongly in favour of the school's fundholder role. She remembered many times under different funding systems when she was unable to get resourcing she needed to participate in school camps or to succeed in her curriculum endeavours. She felt her choices were greatly enhanced under this system, where she had support staff in every class she needed and had been supported to attend camps and a sailing adventure.

Transparency. Many parents indicated the fundholding system was much more transparent and more directly accountable to parents. However, most parents and some teachers were quite unclear about the details of the funding system. For these parents financial management went on trust and systems were not particularly transparent.

Change. Parents frequently told stories about their personal journeys, both fighting for and resisting change. One such story shared by many of the parents and teachers had involved a lengthy dispute the previous year with the MOE who had wanted to change the basis for spending ORRS funds. The parents were successful in their bid to retain the fundholding 'status quo' but saw the dispute as one in a life-long series of battles with the MOE regarding resourcing their children's education. They were prepared to challenge the MOE again if necessary in order to prevent unwelcome change, to retain funding in the school and the flexibility they had experienced on how it was spent.

ORRS fundholding: IEP process.

Choice. A major requirement for receiving ORRS fundholding accreditation was an adherence to the MOE audited IEP process for each student verified in the scheme. No choice existed about whether an IEP was completed, and the MOE had an agenda for how they wanted ORRS money to be spent and IEPs to be written (District Manager, personal communication, May 21, 2004; Manager Eligibility, personal communication, September 4, 2003).

Some of these requirements were viewed as largely bureaucratic and limiting by most teachers and some parents. However, all teachers and almost all (22) parents thought the IEP meeting was important, useful and informative. IEPs were seen to provide a valuable framework of opportunities. All parents and teachers said they would choose to have IEPs or something similar, even if there was a choice, although a few recognised some stigma attached to participating in special education generally. Very few students suggested any changes.

All teachers planned student programmes following through from the IEP written plans and discussions. Most parents were highly satisfied.

The process itself is great: You have to be accountable; you have to front up; you have to be looking at the big picture (Kate, parent & staff).

I never have any problems. The whole thing is run so well (Jacqui, parent).

I feel that everyone has got their eye on the ball, which is: How is it going for Johanna now? Where do we go to next? Did we achieve what we thought we would...? And what should we put in place now? (Marlene, parent).

I haven't had any problems with how the IEPs have been administered. In fact it has been very positive, and what I like about it is that concerns have been brought there and we've all been able to have an opportunity to be listened to; both to speak our concerns and also to help support one another (Martha, parent).

Transparency.

1. IEP Preparation. Teachers felt their role in preparing for meetings was clear to parents. They saw this role as one of coordination, ensuring the right people were invited, a suitable meeting time negotiated, and gathering assessments and evaluations from teaching and support staff. They also assessed objectives themselves, and produced a combined IEP review.

I get the feedback and then I write the review. (Jenny, teacher).

[I] make contact with the staff, because it is just not possible at a high school to have all the teachers at an IEP. (Scott, teacher).

A large majority of parents (19) mentioned preparation and evaluation as important aspects of the IEP process and liked hearing from wider-school teachers about how the student had progressed. Many said the IEP review that they received was useful: brief, but giving a good outline of "where they are working at; what level they've got to" (Cathryn, parent).

2. Presentation of assessments. While teachers needed to present transparent, informative assessment results, they were concerned to do so in a tactful manner. They had seen the depressing results on parents when assessment results, for example reading ages, had been presented too starkly.

I've seen the face and the face tells the story (Scott, teacher).

Two teachers presented aspects of student work in portfolios with work samples, photos and comments. One teacher in particular made consistent use of portfolios. She felt portfolios were a realistic and positive record of student achievement. Observations indicated they were appreciated by parents who made comments and asked questions.

3. Attendance at meetings. Parents generally knew who would attend their meetings and what their roles would be. Occasionally they asked for specific people to be invited, or just brought them along. The meetings were chaired by 'key teachers'. In almost every case a special education adviser was also present. These specialists were qualified senior teachers from the department and, in the case of the Deaf or visually impaired students, advisers from these fields were also present. Almost all parents liked the 'key teacher' arrangements because one person had the 'overview', as Murial described it. The number of people attending the observed meetings varied from two to seven. Analysis of previous meetings showed similar patterns.

The following three tables show historical data from the round of IEPs immediately prior to the one underway at the time of the study regarding attendance and provision of written reports.

Table 3
Attendance at previous IEP meetings
 Analysis of previous IEP Plans (completed in Terms 1 & 2, 2004, n=25)

Wider-School Teachers	Special Ed. Key Teacher	Parent / s or Other whānau		Student	Wider community members (see Table 4)	Other Special Education staff (see Table 4)
		Parents	Other			
0	25	25	1	17	10	23

Table 3 shows parents and key teachers were always present at IEP meetings. Students and support staff were frequently present, but personnel from the community were only present at half the meetings and wider-school teachers not at all.

Table 4
Special education and wider community attendance at previous IEP meetings
 Analysis of previous IEP Plans (completed in Terms 1 & 2, 2004, n=25)

Special education staff present	Meetings Attended	Wider community members present	Meetings attended
Key teacher	25	Supported employment agencies	3
Head of department: - also as Speech-Language Therapist	19 (8)	Advisor for Deaf students	2
Teacher Aide, or Communicator for Deaf students	16	MOE & ACC representatives	2
Other senior special education teachers	15	Hospital School teacher	1
Special education ICT teacher	1	Sensory Resource Centre teacher	1
		IHC	1
		Behaviour support service	1
		Supported living agency	1

Table 4 shows that a range of special education staff regularly attended IEP meetings. Staff from a variety of other agencies also attended, but in much smaller numbers.

Table 5
Written reports provided for meetings
 Analysis of previous IEP Plans (completed in Terms 1 & 2, 2004, n=25)

Written reports provided by:	Number of meetings where reports were provided
Wider-school teachers	23
Teacher Aides / Communicators for Deaf students	18
Speech-Language Therapist	10
Occupational Therapist	5
Physiotherapist	2
2nd Special Ed. teacher	2
Behavioural optometrist	1
Orientation & Mobility specialist	1
Meetings utilising written reports:	25

Table 5 shows that wider-school teachers generally provided written reports for meetings as did support staff (teacher aides and Deaf communicators). The speech-language therapist, who is also the head of department, usually provided written reports as well as attending the meetings of relevant students.

4. Processes at meetings. The meetings observed and those described in interviews, followed a fairly set pattern although there were no written agendas: (a) Parents were greeted and introduced to newcomers; (b) offered a hot drink (mostly); (c) some informal chat preceded most meetings; (d) previous meetings were reviewed, generally based on a review document produced by the teachers; (e) conclusions were drawn about the results of the review; (f) decisions were made whether to continue with particular objectives, refine them or curtail them; (g) the long and medium term future was discussed and new objectives set; (h) long term goals were reviewed; and (i) meetings ended and were usually followed by informal conversation.

Parents generally felt their role was clear at meetings. Various, they said that they listened, found out what had been happening, found out alternatives, reviewed processes, dealt with issues, asked questions, shared and clarified information, planned and made decisions, made suggestions and requests, discussed their goals and dreams and prompted their children to participate.

I put in my bit too (Lauren, parent).

We can throw in our suggestions or queries (Erma, parent).

At some of the IEP meetings I've come and said, 'Lottie does this and ...that at home', and they think, 'Does she?' They know she's independent, but just a few little things she probably doesn't let them [in] on" (Mata, parent).

I try to understand constraints. What are real constraints and what are just in someone's mind? (Martha, parent).

5. Documentation. A review document (evaluation) was provided to parents, usually on arrival at the meeting. Following the meeting, the IEP document and a summary of discussions was sent in draft form to the parents to make changes before finalising the plan, although they were not always labelled 'draft'. The parents then received a final copy of both documents. They were also required to sign a service agreement, which itemised how money and resources would be allocated.

Balance. All participants felt there were opportunities to fine-tune any aspect of the student's programme at any time, to provide an optimum balance between student needs and interests, and demands and requirements from various other quarters. Almost all (4) teachers saw the IEP document as too rigid for these balancing processes, and unsuitable for stating wider aspirations coherently and as reported previously, they had developed a summary sheet which allowed a balance between producing wider goals and smaller interim 'measurable' objectives. Prized holistic goals and dreams could be incorporated and those decisions which still needed to be finalised could be clearly defined and recorded. All teachers found this process satisfactory. While overall all parents were content with the written information they received, some were confused by the distinctions between the IEP document and the summary sheet.

The nature of the IEP changed as the student neared transition. There was usually a gradual reduction of emphasis on academic objectives and a gradual increase in community focus. At a certain point according to one teacher, a few parents and Emma (student), the balance changed

completely, making an IEP model less relevant. Broader goals seemed more appropriate once students were fully involved in transition.

Another feature of balance related to parents' and teachers' roles in teaching and evaluating objectives. There was a strong leaning towards teachers taking most responsibility in these areas. The following three tables show an analysis, in relation to roles and responsibilities, of three sets of documents written earlier in 2004.

Table 6	
Documented parent involvement in IEP evaluation	
Analysis of previous IEP reviews (completed in Terms 1 & 2, 2004, n=18)	
Parents: n=18	Parents involved in evaluation: n=3
Description of parent involvement	
Description	Parents involved
Work placement	1
Behaviour in car	1
Reading log	1

Table 6 shows parents were involved to a minor degree in only three of the eighteen evaluations.

Table 7			
Documented Parent involvement in implementation of IEP objectives.			
Analysis of previous IEP Plans (completed in Terms 1 & 2, 2004, n=25)			
Parents: n=25		Parents involved in meeting objectives: n=17	
IEP objectives: n=196		IEP objectives involving parents: n=38	
Description of parent involvement			
Description	Parents involved	Description	Parents involved
Speech-Language activities	6	Provide shopping money	1
Self management:		Provide information	1
- personal laundry - to do list	1	Assessment	1
- organisation - self-care	4	Community visits	1
Behaviour management	3	Curriculum support	1
Provide lunch money	3	Kitchen skills	1
Receive emails	3	Wider-school liaison	1
Transition objectives	3	Locate resource	1
Homework	2	Farm skills	1
Budgeting	1	Occupational therapy	1

Table 7 shows around three quarters of parents were involved in one or more IEP objectives documented in the previous round of IEPs. However, in total they were involved in just thirty eight of the nearly two hundred objectives and several of these appeared to involve minimal action such as providing money and receiving emails. Eight parents were not involved at all.

Table 8
General Parent involvement in IEP implementation
Analysis of previous IEP Summaries (completed in Terms 1 & 2, 2004, n=25)

Parents: n=25		Parents involved generally: n=19	
Description of general parent involvement			
Description	Parents involved	Description	Parents involved
Decision making	3	Mobility goals	1
Reinforce communication goals	2	Meeting wider-school teachers	1
Health update	2	Provide optometrist report	1
Transition planning	2	Provide information on student	1
Goal setting	2	Independence at home	1
Behaviour management	2	Curriculum support	1
Reading	1	Swimming programme	1
Trial: augmentative communication	1	Health concerns	1
Homework	1	Transport concerns	1
Receive emails	1	Money skills	1

Table 8 shows slightly more parents involved in wider activities than in IEP objectives, as documented in the previous summaries. However, six parents remained uninvolved in any documented aspect of the IEP outside of participation at the meetings.

In concurrence with the document analysis, many parents said they were very involved in one or two objectives, especially social and behavioural objectives, but they reported opportunities for teamwork between meetings were limited. Also, in concurrence with the document analysis, parents generally reported leaving most responsibilities for IEP implementation up to the teachers. The following two tables show the use of home-school diaries in this regard.

Table 9
Home-School Diaries: School Entries
 Entries related to IEPs compared with other communication types (Diaries, n=12; Days, n=29)

Students	Days comments were made	General Comments		IEP / Curriculum Related		Total Comments
		Student Management	Greetings / Chat / Info.	General	Goal/Objective specific	
Samuel	20	7	3	4	9	23
Macey	9	6	0	6	0	12
Damien	29	6	14	12	14	46
Casey	28	12	3	14	5	34
Laura	26	15	4	20	2	41
Alana	24	6	11	13	3	33
Simon	28	12	14	14	2	42
Paddy	24	8	7	8	17	40
Tina	19	5	9	7	8	29
Natalie	13	7	3	3	6	19
Marshall	27	9	15	19	1	44
Sandy	12	9	1	3	0	13
		102	84	123	67	
		Total General: 186		Total IEP/Curriculum: 190		376

Table 10
Home-School Diaries: Home Entries
 Entries related to IEPs compared with other communication types (Diaries, n=12; Days, n=29)

Students	Days comments were made	General Comments		IEP / Curriculum Related		Total Comments
		Student Management	Greetings / Chat / Info.	General	Goal/Objective specific	
Samuel	1	0	0	1	0	1
Macey	3	1	2	0	0	3
Damien	20	7	15	5	2	29
Casey	9	6	4	1	0	11
Laura	3	2	1	1	0	4
Alana	13	10	3	0	0	13
Simon	19	13	12	3	0	28
Paddy	16	7	6	6	0	19
Tina	18	5	13	1	3	22
Natalie	1	0	1	0	0	1
Marshall	8	7	2	0	0	9
Sandy	8	8	0	0	0	8
		66	59	18	5	
		Total General: 125		Total IEP/Curriculum: 23		148

Tables 9 and 10 are an analysis of home-school diary usage for the six week period (29 school days) immediately prior to the date of analysis. Table 9 shows entries made at school and Table 10 shows entries made at home. The tables reveal that school staff used the books more than twice as frequently as parents. Teachers were just as likely to talk about curriculum matters as they were to chat or discuss management issues. Around one fifth of their comments were devoted to specific IEP goals or objectives, although nearly two thirds of these were of a general nature; analysis revealed ‘friendly’ reporting, but little substantive information or discussion. Parents on the other hand, were very unlikely to talk specifically about IEP goals or objectives.

The three students with the lowest usage rate, Sandy, Natalie and Macey, were students considered comparatively independent and able to convey verbal messages to their parents. Wider-school teachers did not comment in the diaries.

Missed Chances: Problems with ORRS prescribed IEPs.

Choice.

1. No choice existed about whether an IEP was completed for ORRS students. There were also regulations and restrictions on ORRS resource allocation and IEP format. The teachers all disagreed in one or more ways with these rules.
2. Teachers provided very few opportunities for teamwork on objectives between meetings, and collaboration and teamwork were not systematic or a documented part of IEPs plans.
3. Parents had no choice of venue for meetings and their opinion was not sought regarding the suitability of the rooms chosen.

4. Several parents said they would prefer to have more input from teacher aides at meetings and the attendance of wider-school teachers, but there was no system for ensuring parents got the opportunity to invite who they wanted to meetings.

Transparency.

1. New subjects, new directions and options for the following year were frequently discussed for the first time at the observed IEP meetings. There was no diary evidence or any other transparent system ensuring parents were informed on these topics ahead of meetings. However, parents generally felt that teachers explained matters well at meetings.

2. Many parents could not explain how funding worked for their child, but all trusted the school's processes.

3. School processes between meetings were not transparent. Many parents commented they did not really understand how teachers planned, what they taught or how their children were progressing in class. Neither were they involved in assessment or written evaluation, and generally only received reviews as they arrived at the meeting. Several parents and teachers noted that these restrictions limited the range of knowledge parents brought to the meetings (see also cluster *[i]*).

4. New parents, and some not so new, said they did not know who was staff, and among the staff who were teachers and who were support staff. These parents commented that this put them at a disadvantage when it came to asking for someone to be present at a meeting, and also in terms of building relationships generally.

5. First IEP meetings had been difficult for some parents and there was no specific transition process for new parents dealing with the meeting itself. However, they said that once they understood what to expect at meetings, they felt more able to put their point of view.

Once you've been to one [it's OK]. You didn't know what to expect initially when you first go... [It's better] once you have been to them and know that you can throw your ideas in and ask for help (Erma, parent).

The atmosphere is very collegial; people feel comfortable in each others company...certainly by the second [meeting]...at the first one...people can sometimes be a little tentative (Scott, teacher).

6. A problem reported by the teachers was variability in the quality of reporting. How to get the best quality feedback from regular class teachers to inform the evaluations, and how to present this meaningfully to the parents was a concern.

I am always changing the way I try to get information out of teachers. That's always the most critical point, because what I can observe and what others are observing are of equal importance (Leanne, teacher).

7. Although several parents prepared in some way for meetings, there was no systematic method for ensuring parents were able to prepare adequately (see also cluster [i]). The parents did not contribute to the written reviews and although almost all (22) would prefer to at least receive them well ahead of the meeting, this was seldom the case. Most left preparation and evaluation to the teachers.

The teachers have been a bit more proactive...[than me] they have worked out what [objectives] she has achieved and what one's she is still working on (May, parent).

8. The content of meetings was not made clear to parents in advance. No agendas were produced for any of the meetings observed. Without agendas it was difficult for parents to contribute topics in advance or to know if enough time would be allocated for their concerns. Following one observed meeting a hasty discussion was held and a decision made standing in the playground. One parent felt she missed some opportunities to really have her say because the teacher's agenda came first and time sometimes ran out.

Sometimes an hour is not long enough, but you have to set limits (Renee, teacher).

9. Some parents were rather confused about the purpose and timing of IEP documentation. All teachers admitted they were sometimes slow to produce paperwork which was not a priority for them. Observations indicated that teachers frequently omitted to explain documents including what parents were signing.

10. No wider-school teachers attended any of the observed meetings or the meetings reviewed by document analysis (see Table 3). Generally only one support staff member was present even though students worked with many support staff during the day. Many parents would like more staff to attend and share perspectives. However, both parents and teachers acknowledged potentially negative spin-offs in that it would be difficult to arrange, cumbersome and perhaps overwhelming and unrealistic. Having just three or four participants with the key teacher acting as coordinator made the meetings comfortable for Murial and several others.

There used to be far too many people invited to IEPs, including medical people and all the rest of it...they are all experts and they all think they know (Murial, parent).

Balance.

1. Most teachers preferred to state broader goals in IEP planning rather than tiny 'measurable' achievement objectives. This was partly because important social outcomes were evaluated qualitatively outside the classroom and were not directly measurable, and partly because they saw tiny objectives as such a small part of what students were actually doing and achieving. However, some did feel on-going tracking and evaluation of objectives needed to be improved. On the other hand, most parents liked small, clear and achievable objectives alongside longer term goals or a vision.
2. While it was considered essential from all perspectives that students continued to receive individualised assistance, some parents and students noted that such attention drew a distinction between them and other students. These participants recognised a degree of 'stigma' and wondered how more services could be delivered in more inclusive ways.
3. Gaining a balance of perspectives at meetings was a problem. Both parents and teachers reported difficulties coordinating with personnel from other agencies and community groups. Sometimes arrangements fell through and meetings were either cancelled or went ahead without the community-based attendees.
4. Document analysis of diaries (Tables 9 & 10) and IEP plans and summaries (Tables 7 & 8) revealed a strong imbalance regarding the on-going participation in IEP implementation and although teachers reported some student achievements, parents seldom responded or initiated discussion on objectives. For some students, diaries were never used to share information regarding IEP objectives.

Participant Suggestions.

1. To eliminate the stigma for students with disabilities, two parents recommended individualising services for all students, so reducing the distinction between the special and general education groups while providing better supports for needy mainstream students.
2. All teachers said they wanted to improve evaluation and IEP preparation processes. Some considered the possibility of a more systematic approach to preparing for meetings that provided more opportunities to parents. Three ideas were (a) developing an agenda with the parents, (b) asking them to write down who they wanted and what they wanted discussed, and (c) ensuring evaluations/reviews were in the hands of parents well before the meeting. Many parents also wanted to know more about processes, choices and opportunities for their children and their own involvement.

3. Some parents and teachers pondered whether a different meeting format might better meet the needs of transition students: a meeting and process which was more holistic and focussed on the wider issues of community success and which incorporated all aspects of the students' aspirations.

You almost need to make the IEPs [under two headings] like 'statutory obligations' and 'holistic' or 'child-focussed' (Richard, parent).

4. Opinion varied on how many people should attend the IEP meetings. Some (4) suggested this should be negotiated ahead of time as a matter of course, rather than leaving it as an ad hoc arrangement. One parent suggested that the most significant teachers should be specifically invited and efforts made to accommodate their scheduling needs. Another felt it would be better if it was the whānau teacher who chaired meetings because the process would be less marginalised and,

It would be another voice alongside you guys (Richard, parent).

Inclusion / Integration.

Choice. The school offered a range of 'choices' for ORRS funded students. Parents and teachers gave many positive examples of integration and some of successful inclusion. Most parents felt they and their children had a fair choice of options and the chance to change if needed.

She's gone to the classes she likes and we've taken her out of the classes she didn't like or we felt that she wasn't getting anything out of (Cathryn, parent).

Often parents saw the value of inclusion as a benefit to everyone (including classroom teachers, peers and society at large) as they learned to value and understand diversity.

[They need to] know that this kid is different and that she's OK... Society needs to know [them] and be less condemning... Even though they say the government wants inclusion in schools ... we're isolated, and it's not just in education... She's different and we're made to feel she's different right across the board (Hillary, parent).

All students were highly positive about school in general, but Emma (student) expressed two sides of inclusion: When inclusion was real, there was a feeling that she wasn't, "caught in the 'special ed. bubble'...and the attitudes around that." Several parents and all teachers shared the

point of view that positive experiences with inclusion were highly dependent on the individual classroom teachers involved.

A lot of classes are really good; it comes down to the staff and the [other] students. I like it when you go in there and you are part of the class. I don't like it when you go in and you're part of the furniture...you're sitting in the back there and they don't want to have eye contact with you. I hate that feeling... [there] probably [needs to be] more of an emphasis on accepting our guys and including them in a lot of things. Meaningful inclusion, not just token ...not just put in a corner and told, 'Right you've got a teacher aide; you're [over] there' (Cathryn, parent & staff).

These parents also understood inclusion was dependent on the opportunity to share information and solve problems together.

Transparency. Opportunities for parents to become involved with activities in the wider-school were reasonably transparent; parents were able to identify several committees, sport and cultural opportunities which were advertised and systematically organised. Parents also largely felt choices for students in the wider-school were adequately explained.

Change. Short term change factors could affect student wellbeing when relief teachers were employed and when trips were not notified with sufficient warning. The teachers sometimes kept students in their centres rather than sending them to classes staffed by relievers. A reliever told one student that she didn't belong in class and should be in a special centre.

Balance. All parents said the opportunity for their children to be included in regular classes and generally in the life of the school was exceptionally important. Inclusion in whānau time (see glossary) was also seen to provide many connections and social opportunities and the teachers endeavoured to ensure all students attended. Almost all parents wanted a balance of inclusion and individualised provisions and they felt the balance they reached met their child's needs most of the time. They wanted supported opportunities for their children to learn alongside and interact naturally with their peers.

My goal of trying to get her into Drama was basically to give her an opportunity to be equal in the main school...I see no reason why students from the Centre should not be in the major school production and the [stage challenge] (May, parent).

Missed Chances: Problems with Inclusion and Integration.

1. Individual students identified systems problems that reduced opportunities for achieving their goals: Absence of wider-school teachers from IEP meetings and the role of teacher aides acting as a barrier to direct relationships with the teacher were mentioned by a few.

I think what happens is that the teacher aide might know that you are struggling or that this stresses you out, but because you've got that person sitting there beside you, the teacher just misses it (Emma, student).

Some parents also felt this was a problem. Janine (parent & staff) pointed out that it also limited her son's opportunity to be 'matey' and made students feel 'different.'

2. Despite being content with schooling arrangements, parents were mainly obliged to accept arrangements that were offered; full inclusion was not offered to many of the students. A problem, expressed strongly by the teachers and around a third of students related to choice of wider-school subjects. The two students below did not have their requests met.

I want to do cooking and ceramics because you can make things (Sandy, student).

I want to try new things - Woodwork class... Can I do Woodwork? (Natalie, student).

3. Balancing special education provisions including special classes, specialist services and community/transition opportunities with the opportunities for inclusion was a concern which reached beyond the needs of the ORRS funded students themselves. Regular students did not get the opportunity to know, and learn from, those students with limited inclusion. Yet, as citizens they needed to develop important understandings about diversity. Two teachers and two parents mentioned this issue.

4. Teachers variously mentioned missed opportunities for better student inclusion and increased parental participation that related to (a) the physical isolation of the special centres resulting in an effective physical barrier to involvement, (b) the possibility that parents didn't see relationships with class teachers as relevant, (c) limited collaboration, and (d) the school report system which left some students without school reports (see cluster [h]).

5. The understandings, practices and attitudes of individual wider-school teachers were sometimes seen by parents as unhelpful, or worse, discriminatory:

- Inadequate knowledge of parents' goals and ambitions for their children meant regular teachers were ill equipped to include the young people meaningfully in classes. Parents said they were never consulted. Analysis of students' diaries and interviews confirmed that

wider-school teachers almost never used these to communicate with parents. Several parents said they would become more involved if they were invited.

- Parents felt that many regular teachers did not know their children in the way they knew other students and could not therefore teach them in an inclusive way, or foresee curriculum adaptation and task modification needs. Examples were given of teachers not understanding the needs of Deaf people, or those with severe autism, cerebral palsy or intellectual disabilities. They were also mentioned as not understanding the influence of differing learning styles, or the desirability of analysing problems and sharing them with the family.

The teachers don't have a lot of understanding of special needs, and I think it's better that they have more knowledge...so they [would] maybe think of a bit different structure in the classroom by knowing [the needs] a little bit better (Janine, parent).

We seem to be talking on the surface, rather than deeper discussions... [It's] their understanding: their awareness of what her capabilities are and her needs...It's the learning styles thing that they need. If she is engaged (if any student is engaged), they will progress, but if they are not engaged, they just don't do anything (Hine, parent).

The teacher needs to be aware that Deaf people can't do two things at once: They can't watch the teacher and the communicator at the same time (Martha, parent).

6. One key opportunity that was not taken up by many parents was attendance at the parent-teacher interviews conducted in the wider-school. Teachers thought IEP meetings might meet parents needs better and possibly seem more relevant to parents. However, wider-school teachers did not attend these. Parents' reasons for not involving themselves in parent teacher interviews were expressed strongly.

They don't know my son (Janine, parent).

It's not very well organised (Joy, parent).

There isn't enough time to discuss their needs (Hine, parent).

Teachers were not aware that Special Centre parents might come, or what to say (Susan, Parent).

Teachers don't have a lot to say, 'she's a good student', but not about her needs (Diane, parent).

I went to some. I gave up in the end because I thought, 'Oh well, the teachers report to the IEP process'. They didn't feel they needed to say much at the parent teacher interviews. They see that that is what the Special Centre [does]... As a school, well it's not realistic for the teachers to attend IEPs...[but] I didn't feel that they were actually there to do Natalie's parent-teacher

interviews really. I tried once and thought, "This is absolutely hopeless" so I didn't do it again. I don't know that I got a full list of the teachers' names. Natalie couldn't tell me so it was harder to arrange appointments and such like... She can't tell me most of the time, or not coherently (Sonia, parent).

Of the parents who did attend parent teacher interviews (6), only three had satisfactory or good experiences.

Participant Suggestions.

1. Several parents sought more meaningful parent-teacher interviews with a concomitant increase in teacher knowledge of their child. One parent felt that teacher roles and responsibilities would need to be clarified in advance of the interviews, if these were to become an effective forum.

Parents need to feel they would be worthwhile and teachers need to know parents are coming and will expect them to know about their child (Sonia, parent).

2. Some parents wanted each of the following: improved information on curriculum; more choice of subjects; more information about what was available, e.g. sports, national qualifications and fee discounts; improved systems for quickly sorting issues as they arise, such as transport and facilities on trips and sports or cultural events; more opportunities for involvement in school; and more contact through the diaries with class and whānau teachers regarding both academic and social inclusion.

If I could win a wish, it would be that she had more friends (Marlene, parent).

3. Many parents saw greater knowledge and shared understanding as essential to enhancing the general climate of respect and acceptance that would lead to increased opportunities for 'real inclusion'. These parents, all the teachers and one student felt more professional development focusing on inclusive practices, roles and responsibilities and specific student knowledge needed to be provided for classroom teachers and relief teachers. Teacher attendance at IEP meetings was also sought.

Then they would get to know [the student] personally and what our goals are too...that would be a lot more useful (Jacqui, parent).

Transition.

Choice. Networking in the community became more important as students neared the transition stage. Personnel from many organisations such as the Royal Foundation

for the Blind, and CCS (see glossary) were proactive in transition arrangements for students (see also cluster [c]). For some, however, there was a strong sense of lack of choice in post-school options or they were unable to see opportunities clearly. Two teachers were concerned that some parents appeared unable to make decisions and move the process along.

Transparency. Transition from school had no clearly defined features. It was tailored for each student. Parents generally saw school as the coordinating centre for post-school arrangements and also as a source of information and support in decision-making. Most felt transition activities were working well. Teachers said transition could be highly successful, but acknowledged it was a relatively new area for some of them.

We share what we know. And we are still learning, so as much as we know, we are passing on [to parents]. Otherwise we try to find out (Renee, teacher).

Teachers felt it was the parents' responsibility to work on post-school options once school had provided contacts or set up meetings, visits or work experience. Most parents involved in transition were also clear about this, and felt the roles of each worked well.

Change. Change brought considerable stress for both parents and students, along with new opportunities. Some members of each group reported stresses related to times of change especially regarding transitions to and from high school and also between different classes and services within the school. Transition into high school usually began many months, sometimes years, beforehand. Systems were planned to ensure students and families knew as much as possible about the school prior to their first day and had begun to establish routines and form relationships. Key teachers were allocated promptly, ensuring clear lines of communication early in the partnership.

Balance. Several of the parents and students interviewed were involved in the senior years at high school, and balancing the processes necessary to facilitate transition to post-secondary education, work or supported work and community living options. Most parents were highly satisfied with the balance achieved. Some students recognised that transition could be 'scary' and that they needed to balance their desire for independence with their need for support from parents, school and community networks, in order to be successful.

[Other students] go off and wherever they go, they get the same results because they're the key variable. But it's not like that for special education. It's not that simple, because no matter how good [we] are, if we don't have the other people, it doesn't work (Emma, student).

Missed Chances: Problems with Transition.

1. Some problems experienced by students were to do with transition between 'key teachers' and between different special education centres.

I seemed to fall through a crack (Emma, student).

She was devastated...she wasn't consulted. She felt as though she wasn't wanted (Mata, parent).

2. For some parents and students there was a real problem with post-secondary opportunities for community involvement, accommodation, care and employment. There appeared to be no satisfactory choices.
3. Balancing inclusion in regular classes with transition needs was a dilemma for parents as students moved into the senior school. Many were uncertain about the nature or purpose of their child's polytechnic courses. Some parents of younger students were anxious about how the transition process worked and what role they would need to play.
4. Parents transitioning into the school needed more assistance to understand and participate in IEP processes as they operated at this school (see *IEPs*).

The Students' role.

Choice. Most senior students and a few juniors had the choice of attending their IEP meetings. A few parents and students reported that they discussed what subjects to raise at meetings, but there was minimal evidence that students were otherwise involved in planning or organising for the meetings. Nor was there evidence they were actively engaged in self-evaluation of IEP goals or objectives. Their opinion was not reflected in the evaluation documents. Most students said their main function at meetings was to answer questions, but they also were able to say what they thought whenever they chose.

Table 11 (following) shows considerable variation in student participation at IEP meetings. When compared to Table 12, some students are seen to participate similarly to parents in this situation; others contribute very little. Half (4) of the students were given no responsibilities and the other half only one or two responsibilities. Most students asked very few questions, but answered a considerable number, or indicated agreement with the comments of others. Notably, students were able to assert their opinion, generally using more than one sentence to do so. Unlike their parents, they did not engage in a lot of chat; 98% of their comments were relevant.

**Table 11: IEP Observation
STUDENT PARTICIPATION AT IEP MEETINGS**

Amount & Type of Involvement

NAME	TOTAL		OTHER				REACTIONS				ASSERTIONS					
	Participation for all utterance types		Greetings/Chat		General or IEP		Answered; Agreed; Acknowledged		Asked Question		Asserted opinion; Gave information		Challenged Disagreed		Took Responsibility	
	Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total
Tara	76	97	0	0	0	0	44	56	1	1	24	31	6	8	1	1
Damien	54	82	0	0	1	1	25	29	3	3	25	49	0	0	0	0
Samuel	46	107	2	3	2	2	4	4	5	6	32	89	1	3	0	0
Natalie	86	121	2	2	0	0	37	43	10	12	27	49	8	13	2	2
Alana	34	37	1	1	0	0	27	27	0	0	6	9	0	0	0	0
Kitty	97	124	0	0	0	0	62	67	8	10	25	44	1	2	1	1
Emma	19	24	2	2	0	0	8	12	0	0	7	8	0	0	2	2
Tiana	43	66	1	1	0	0	26	34	0	0	8	16	8	15	0	0
	455	658	8	9	3	3	233	272	27	32	154	295	24	41	6	6
% of Total Participation		100		1.4		0.5		41.3		4.9		44.8		6.2		0.9

Notes: Tables 11

Values for 'Turns' represent the number times a student spoke during the meeting.

Values for 'Total' represent the number of discreet comments comprising those turns.

Transparency. Generally, students felt IEP meetings were helpful. They felt they understood the point of the meetings, their role, and the support they needed from their parents. All students who attended meetings (8) said they felt they had an opportunity to contribute to the plan and make decisions if they wanted to.

Basically [the meeting is] about telling them if its ok and what can be done to make it better. They listen to what you say. Generally things happen that you say you want (Marshall, student).

I think it helps knowing what is going on generally; that affects what I do in school, [but] I'm not always in there with my whole brain. I trust Mum she usually gets it right (Huata, student).

Change. Parents, teachers and students agreed more input was required of students as they got older. Table 11 shows students were largely able to assert their opinions. They were also expected to share decision making and answer more for themselves in meetings. This was corroborated by several students.

I used to tell Mum and she would say. Now, I say (Huata, student).

Many parents and all teachers talked of the students' time at high school as a time for "cutting the apron strings" (Jenny, teacher), and for students "speaking with their own voice" (Kate, parent & staff). Parents and teachers all thought an increasing student role was important.

We can say to her, 'well what do you think? How would that be?' Then it is really good, because it looks OK to us and it looks OK to her, so that's what we are going to do (Marlene, parent).

Balance. Almost all students expressed pleasure or satisfaction when their parents were involved with their school endeavours. Students were generally less concerned than parents and teachers about their developing independence.

[Mum] does everything for me at high school. She makes sure I've got everything I need. She looks at the timetable and knows what teacher suits me. 'That would be good for Tara in that teacher's class.' She will talk to the boss of the centre...and sort it out...That's cool. I need someone to support me (Tara, student).

However, for some students parental involvement could be both positive and uncomfortable, but necessary.

Everyone comes to know what is going on. It's like you become world famous at [Midland]...I've grown up with it...no-one asked me...it's a balance (Emma, student).

The teachers believed students should be engaged in taking responsibility for their own learning; independence, problem solving, communication and social skills were major themes which ran through the long term goals of most IEPs, both those analysed and those observed. Achieving these outcomes involved balancing student independence with parental oversight.

They are taking more ownership. But it's gradually, some more quickly than others...For some it's not just encouraging the student to take more responsibility, it's allowing the parents to let go (Renee, teacher).

Many parents also had expectations related to the life stage of their families and their own careers and personal health which needed to be balanced with the need to provide support for their children with disabilities.

Missed Chances: Problems with the Students' Role.

1. There was no consistent system for consulting on the degree of student participation at meetings. Parents and teachers sometimes had differing opinions which were not clarified in advance. This sometimes led to unfortunate situations.

She was really uncomfortable that we were all discussing her. She thought she was getting told off...and she started crying and then she stalked out (Henry, parent).

2. Balance between support and independence was difficult to achieve. For example, students were more independent when they were given responsibility for communication, and for some senior students diaries were seldom used. However, this had resulted in examples of miscommunication between parents and teachers. Some (3) teachers said they tried to make phone calls to ensure important information had been received.

3. Despite major aims of increasing student independence and responsibility, students on the whole were not actively engaged in the IEP process, beyond participating in the meeting itself.

4. A few students were circumspect about meetings. Some felt their opinion was not always listened to as much as their parents'. Two said they were unhappy at times in meetings, some were uninterested, and some found aspects confusing.

[Sometimes the adults] talk across me or don't let me talk (Jack, student).

I feel happy when they say good things about me. Sometimes I feel a bit cross with what they say when I can't do the hard work (Sandy, student).

I don't listen half the time... I'm just not that interested (Kiri, student).

Sometimes a lot of people are talking and I get mixed up. In the meeting yesterday, I wondered what people were talking about... sometimes I ask, sometimes I can't be bothered... [Sometimes when Scott and Mum make decisions] I feel it was not my choice. I didn't want to do that (Tara, student).

Participant Suggestions.

One parent suggested the degree of student participation should be specifically arranged with parents before each meeting.

[c] Opportunities and Relationships.

Opportunities to build relationships were seen by parents and teachers as the most critical aspect of the IEP and general school processes. This sometimes began years beforehand in informal ways and many parents said a factor in choosing the school was the longstanding nature of their relationships.

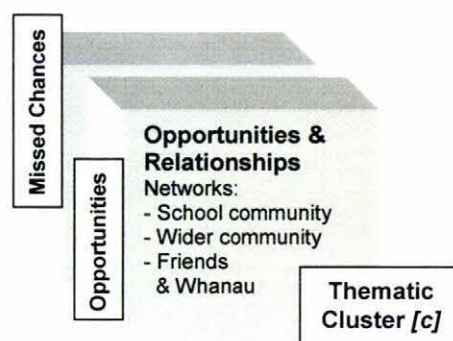


Fig. 8

Figure 8 illustrates the major sub-theme in this cluster as *networks*, which provide opportunities to develop relationships between school, whānau, friends and the wider community.

Networks: School community. Opportunities to form relationships with the wider-school staff and be involved in wider-school activities were made through connections to kapa haka, music, sports, dance, drama events and other student performances, school trips, PTA, Board of Trustees, open night, outstanding individual teachers, Māori whānau events, parent teacher interviews, Year 9 meet the teacher barbeques, house events, powhiri and opportunities to meet the principal. Special education events and key teachers were highly significant. The parent 'action group' formed in 2003 to combat what was seen as MOE intrusion (see also cluster [b]), was frequently mentioned as a great show of solidarity, and importantly, an opportunity to share stories with staff and other parents. In addition, some of the parents were on the staff themselves. Parents variously reported that each of these connections afforded opportunities to build relationships that supported them to support their child.

Some parents also mentioned individual wider-school teachers who spent time teaching in the special centres. Parents were very happy with this arrangement as it extended the network of

staff with high levels of student knowledge further into the wider-school, and provided much valued specialist teaching within the centres. Teachers also valued the input of their colleagues in the centres.

Almost all parents and teachers saw IEP meetings as an opportunity to make new contacts and to renew old. New perspectives were a welcome dimension for several parents. They appreciated the attendance of teachers related to new areas, such as the special education ICT specialist and the ASDAN (see glossary) teacher.

Except for the key teacher provision and IEP meetings, there was no formal structure identified for this kind of networking; relationships tended to grow differently depending on a host of interconnecting factors including, student health, student interest such as sport music or kapa haka, curriculum need, parent strengths and interests such as culture and learning support skills.

Networks: Wider community. All parents had connections beyond the school, which provided an array of opportunities and enhanced success for both themselves and the student in many areas including (a) sport (the Halberg Trust, Special Olympics); (b) daily living and parent support (IHC, Support Links, Options in Daily Living); (c) supported employment (IHC, Phoenix Foundation, Options in Daily Living); (d) behaviour management (Tautoko Services); (e) transition to university or technical institutes (Disability support services provided by the tertiary institutes); (f) mental health (Child and Family Services); (g) support for specific disabilities and during illness (Deaf Foundation, Foundation for the Blind, CCS, IHC, Parent-to-Parent, Hospital School); as well as (h) church groups and cultural groups.

For many parents IEP meetings provided a valued opportunity to develop and maintain relationships with a wider group of community agencies and individuals. Many individuals were considered integral to the process and they came to every IEP for the student; some had known families for many years, in some cases since preschool. They provided important links and valuable support to families. Others came and went depending on the needs at the time and the wishes of the parents and teachers.

Teachers tried to maintain contact with these outside agencies, individuals and groups as well as locate, develop and maintain connections related to work experience opportunities. Teachers were frequently seen to have an important role in providing contacts and supporting families to access community based services and for explaining the roles of different community agencies.

They know avenues where I can get help for her...There's a lot of opportunities out there, and I ask lots of questions and they help me as much as they can (Mata, parent).

Networks: Friends and whānau. Some parents used meetings to share with the team the role of people from their personal circle. For example Lauren invited a friend who often helped with homework, providing an opportunity for the teacher to explain details of the reading programme. Whānau also acted as a second pair of ears. Murial (parent) said it was good to have someone with you because alone, "you don't hear the whole story."

Missed Chances: Problems with Networks.

1. No robust network existed which incorporated regular communication between the wider-school teachers and the parents; class teachers did not attend IEP meetings, and parents seldom attended parent-teacher meetings (see cluster [b]).
2. Several parents and teachers said it was difficult to get some community groups to attend IEP meetings and coordinating times with them was also a problem. There appeared to be varying expectations across sectors of service providers. Some specialists who did attend were reported to dominate meetings or lacked understanding of what teachers and parents wanted.

They tend to have their own little agenda among themselves (Murial, parent).

3. Emma (student) felt people with disabilities, who could support and mentor school leavers, were hard to find in the community and not always very welcoming. Emma said she needed support and information from her parents and the school, as well as the courage to get out and see for herself what opportunities were out there.
4. Some parents were uncertain whether they knew enough about community groups to decide who to invite to meetings. They were anxious that the personnel present matched their child's changing needs.

Participant Suggestions.

1. Most parents sought opportunities to build stronger links with staff and with each other.

It would be ideal to have a meeting with [teachers] at the beginning of the year, then they know me; they know her. Then they will know the background of her home situation, what she's doing, what her needs are...then the teachers can come back later on and feel welcome to ring up if they have any concerns (Hine, parent).

Some parents wanted more informal links such as school trips, different fund-raising activities and barbeques. Others wanted more formal opportunities to see student work in progress, such as improved access to classrooms and a special education 'meet the teachers' evening, or open days/weeks or a combination of both.

2. Many suggestions involved providing parents with information; information evenings focussed on IEPs, meetings, inclusion, writing evaluations, community networks, transition and post-school possibilities were all proposed.

3. Several parents said they would value the opportunity to establish relationships with wider-school teachers and other groups at IEP meetings. One suggestion was to decide with the parents which teachers and aides should be specifically invited to meetings.

We need to be inviting more people along to start discussing; to see what they have to offer (Cathryn, parent & staff).

4. One parent presented the idea that a broader IEP hui would create more opportunities for the whole team to interact and "create a bit more community energy" (Richard, parent).

4.4.2 Supports/Barriers

Supports are those aspects of the setting that nurture and provide tangible assistance to students and their families and the school. Although many parents identified themselves as 'determined' or even 'stroppy' in regards to ensuring their voice was heard when necessary, they all also identified many supports which had been provided to assist them. Barriers to parental participation were also evident at this level. The kinds of support received can be seen as relating to school climate, systems, processes and structures, and supportive relationships: the frames of reference identified in Figure 5.

4.4.2.1 Thematic Clusters: Supports

[d]. Supports and Climate. Figure 9 shows aspects of school culture or climate that supported parents and students to participate. These were

- welcome, the degree to which an easy reception supported parents once they had approached the school for whatever reason;
- warmth, describes whether or not experiences beyond the ‘front door’ were friendly and sincere;
- acceptance, those supports received by parents that provided affirmations and approval for themselves and for their children; and
- privilege, where ORRS students and/or parents were thought to be extended advantages not available to others.

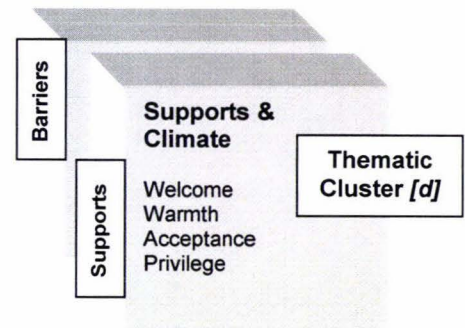


Fig. 9

Welcome. All participants agreed that students with disabilities and their families were welcomed in the school. All key teachers placed high priority on welcoming parents and others. Parents were completely satisfied that they were welcome by both staff and students at any time, in any of the special centres. Observation confirmed that parents certainly felt ‘at home’. They were variously observed making their own cups of tea, chatting to a teacher aide in the student laundry, chatting to teachers and students in the classrooms or waiting on the comfortable chairs outside the classrooms chatting to passers-by. Parents were also pleased that anyone was welcome in the centres, because any school student could meet there with friends for lunch or to socialise generally. Those parents whose children were not based in centres felt they were welcome to meet with the key teachers at any time. Elaine (teacher) explained she tried to develop a welcoming climate in meetings by offering coffee, sitting equally in a group, and making sure everyone was introduced. Many parents reported the other teachers did likewise and that they appreciated these efforts.

When you arrive there’s usually a bit of casual chat. I like that... I think that’s important...I’m always offered a coffee... I like that. I think that’s a relaxing thing (May, parent)

It all works well because it’s welcoming and everybody is friendly (Cathryn, parent & staff).

You can just have whoever you want there, you know, teacher’s aide, [my partner], if Mum and Dad come down, just anyone is welcome to go (Jacqui, parent).

Most teachers talked about the welcoming, 'open door' policy of the principal, which was perceived as presenting genuine opportunities for parents. Senior staff and other special education staff were also considered welcoming and supportive by the teachers and many parents. Some wider-school teachers were also said to be welcoming; those who were provided valued support.

Barriers: Problems with Welcome.

1. Some parents said they worried about attending meetings. However, Tipene was happy his whānau were welcome to support him.

I do feel a little bit apprehensive, but over the years you learn to deal with it...Once you sit down and you get going and you're looking at the positive stuff, its okay...because I know I've got support with my sister there (Tipene, parent).

2. Some teachers wondered whether parents did in fact feel welcome to invite everyone they wanted.

Maybe that would be overstepping your boundaries (Jenny, teacher).

I'm always saying, 'and who else would you like invited?' and I tend to invite people I think should be there or need to be there. It tends to be directed from me (Renee, Teacher).

3. The welcome experienced by students and families did not permeate the whole school; students with disabilities and their families could not be assured of a welcoming response in all classes, or from all wider-school teachers. Sometimes they felt merely tolerated.

Warmth. The parents and teachers all reported that almost every experience with each other had been friendly and the meetings in particular were very positive events. Observations confirmed this and revealed genuinely warm and friendly occasions in every case. The warmth and sincerity of the relationships was evident as parents and teachers strolled together to meeting rooms or chatted informally before hand.

It's really nice to sit there and listen to all the good points. You know sometimes you come away feeling a little bit 'buzzy' because you've heard some really nice things. And the nicer things outweigh the rat bag things she does. So that's really nice (Sheena, parent).

I've always felt relaxed and have a good laugh (Susan, parent)

You never get any negativity out of it...you don't go putting any blame on anybody. You just look at the problem [in] a positive sort of way and what we can do to get it right (Tipene, parent).

A big majority of students who attended meetings said that mostly they were made to feel good at the meetings. Most students said the meetings made them feel "happy", "good", or "alright." All described school in general positively, for example as 'great', 'cool' and 'brilliant'. They felt teachers and teacher aides were friendly and warm.

Barriers: Problems with Warmth.

1. Some parents (7) and one teacher made remarks about the tone of home-school diary comments. They felt they should be largely or even exclusively positive. This was mostly, but not always the case.
2. Two students commented on negativity in meetings which had made them upset. In both cases the students said they had left meetings feeling upset.

Participant Suggestions.

Two parents felt that when a negative comment was really necessary in a diary entry, it should be balanced with a positive. They said it would then be possible to give balanced feedback to their children. One teacher commented that she needed to work with the teacher aides more on balancing comments, to ensure an overall positive tone was achieved.

Acceptance. Almost all parents felt there was a strong climate of acceptance emanating from the school in general. Many also noted the friendliness of other students shown to their children and to themselves. Differences were largely accepted and frequently celebrated. Some parents (6) identified that the accepting culture of the school was instrumental in the successful inclusion/integration of their child.

What I thought about some of the other schools was they wanted a square peg in a square hole or a round peg in a round hole, with Freyberg it seemed to me, no matter what shape you were, they seemed to get the hole to fit (Diane, parent).

It would not have been possible in any other school (Jacqui, parent).

Parents and teachers reported high levels of comfort with each other and all except one parent said they always felt accepted, 'as part of the team' in IEP meetings. Most parents had

previously experienced unsatisfactory IEPs and discrimination, and had over the years become “older and wiser” (Erma), or “tempered by fire” (Jacqui). Many said they would not settle for a situation where their views were not accepted and treated with respect. Students were generally happy to accept their parents at school as well, even though parents of other students didn’t often come to school. Emma said she accepted that she needed extra supports, and almost all the other students reported they really liked support from their parents at school and at home.

Barriers: Problems with Acceptance.

1. One student talked about uncomfortable situations with relief teachers not accepting who she was or respecting her right to be in class.
2. A few parents and teachers signalled a warning that the school climate appeared to be becoming less accepting of difference with crackdowns on uniform, hairstyles and various behaviours leading to a more rigid attitude towards difference.
3. Parents were largely disconnected from the wider-school processes. Some commented they did not feel accepted as true partners in the wider-school education or pastoral care of their children.

Participant Suggestions.

1. Emma suggested relief teachers be provided with more information and training.
2. Some parents mentioned they wanted the school to ensure the tradition of tolerance and acceptance was not lost in the recent drive for uniformity.

I hope it doesn't shift too far because if you are a person like Emma who is already exceptional, you need the culture to be accepting of people and their exceptionalities. Or else you become hammered (Richard, parent).

Privilege. Parents and students accepted a variety of special provisions, which made allowance for disability and removed barriers. For example, blind, physically slow and fragile students all had privileges allowing them to leave class early to avoid corridor crushes. There appeared to be a tolerance and understanding of privilege by the students’ peers.

Parental privileges were also mentioned. Several parents commented they felt welcome to ring special education teachers at home when serious issues arose. Teachers reported that this did

happen from time to time, and that parents were generally thoughtful; they did not usually ring for trivial matters.

I don't know if I would with mainstream kids...It's just that little bit extra that you do for them
(Elaine, teacher).

A few (3) parents reported they had changed student subjects if the student didn't like them. Most regular students have to stay with their original choices. Teachers also tried to keep parents informed when students had achieved well in class or other positive events. As Scott (teacher) and a few parents said, regular teenagers often do not keep parents informed, so having eyes and ears at school was viewed as a bonus. Two parents also mentioned the IEP meeting as a bonus that other parents aren't privileged to get.

Barriers: Problems with Privilege.

Some parents acknowledged that privileges also made their children's experiences 'different'. Murial (parent) gave the example where special education students, with their teacher aides, are able to 'jump' the café queues; students are protected and supervised. This is not the same opportunity as other students have to make mistakes and to wait in line.

Participant Suggestions.

Murial (parent) wanted greater care exercised in the application of privilege to ensure it didn't become a barrier to learning.

[e]. Supports and Systems. **Figure 10** shows *special education* as the prominent system at Midland High supporting ORRS students and their parents. Participants identified a desirable support system as *responsive, accessible* and *proactive*. This system can also create barriers for students and parents. Participants' perceptions of the efficacy of the system and some dilemmas in relation to school management and the special education management committee are presented in this cluster.

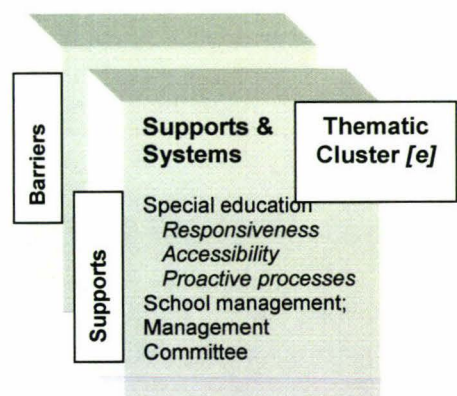


Fig. 10

Special Education. The special education department provided a system of supports designed to fulfil the school's special education policy (see Appendix A for school policies). This involved teaching, administrative and pastoral supports delivered by ORRS funded teachers and support staff, with specialist services such as physiotherapy provided either from within the expertise of the department or by contract to outside specialists. Almost all students accessed an additional level of support through specialist learning centres in the form of personal and pastoral care, learning support and/or community based activities. Students received services based on the decisions of the individual IEP teams and within the total department budget. Issues related to the IEP process are reported in cluster [b].

All parents and teachers and many students expressed a need for special education support, and parent involvement in that support. Special education provisions were seen as both enormously important to ensure the success of the student and conversely, by some, as limiting the potential to develop systems within the wider-school. Many expressed the potential for inclusion as a balance between the two styles of education (see also cluster [b]).

Responsiveness. All parents and many students reported positively on the ability of the school's systems to respond to the changing needs of their children, both on a day-to-day basis and over time. Several parents talked about how IEP meetings offered substantial opportunities to discuss their vision and long-term goals in a broad, holistic manner. They believed that between meetings teachers worked towards achieving these goals and dreams. All teachers also felt the meeting was a time for parents to present "their dreams, their aspirations...where they would like to see their children end up, go, move to" (Jenny). Most teachers added that these discussions in turn guided the selection of goals, objectives, and on-going decisions throughout the year. Older students were observed to be very involved in this part of the meeting with both parents and teachers encouraging their input. All teachers said they tried to listen to parents' wishes and adapt their programmes responsively.

It's...the parents we want to guide the school as to where we should head (Leanne, teacher).

Adopting flexible schedules, providing learning support, providing transport to hospital appointments, allowing flexible attendance, modifying or changing courses as needs changed, assisting with behaviour and health issues in the home, and working alongside the Correspondence School and Hospital School were given as examples of responsiveness. Parents also appreciated rapid responses to phone calls and the speed with which urgent information was distributed. The special education staff or senior management were active in most examples of positive response. For example, Sarah initiated a search for work experience

for her daughter, which was followed up by the transition teacher and supported with teacher liaison, transport and teacher aide assistance. Several (10) parents also mentioned the school took notice “when people said, look this doesn’t really work” (Sheena, parent).

Someone will say ‘OK, how about we try this,’ and set a different goal that’s similar to try to get the best outcome for her... [If] you get negative stuff from the teachers or from me to you guys, it can be discussed in a proper manner (Tipene, parent).

Everything is so prompt...Everything is actioned, rather than waiting down the track (Hine, parent).

Barriers: Problems with Responsiveness.

Occasionally problems had occurred with class placements. Two parents felt alternative solutions had not been explored adequately when problems arose, resulting in their children being removed from classes.

Participant Suggestion.

One teacher, a few parents and Emma (student), felt that a change of emphasis from IEP to a transition or personal plan would allow the programme to be more responsive as students got older.

Accessibility. Accessibility related to the staff, choice of subject and the physical spaces in the school. All meeting rooms, but not all classrooms were wheelchair accessible. Class size and layout also contributed to problems with physical access.

Students’ key teachers were the parents’ primary access to the school. Parents all reported knowing who to go to and how to go about it. All parents and teachers and many students commented positively on the accessibility of special education staff. Parents could expect to have access to teachers immediately or within a few hours. Department organisation ensured that teacher aides and specialist staff could be available to attend meetings as needed. The principal and senior staff were also perceived by parents and teachers as accessible and supportive.

The overwhelming sense was that the system was there to support the parents and students to achieve their goals, and almost all parents believed there was good access to the classes and programmes they wanted their child to attend, although there were reports of requests being

turned down. Teachers all believed that access to programmes was generally negotiated satisfactorily, within the limits of existing structures and practices (see also cluster [b]).

Barriers: Problems with Access.

1. Parents had limited access to information about student progress, and seldom saw the work that students were doing in any regular, special or polytechnic class. Many were unaware of classroom processes in both regular and special classes. Neither were they very proactive in this regard; several parents visited Elaine's classroom almost daily, and although they did look at the wall displays she reported no-one had ever asked to see their child's work.
2. Several students reported they could not always attend the classes they wanted. Teachers felt there were barriers to students attending some classes, which did not exist for other students. For example, special education students were sometimes moved out of over crowded classes as a first option, without considering alternatives. The teachers considered this practice discriminatory.
3. Almost all parents worked exclusively through the special education system to access the wider-school. Wider-school teachers were largely not directly accessible. Richard (parent) expressed that he felt special education was marginalised in the school. The teachers also expressed this.

They are two quite separate entities, the Special Ed. Faculty and the school...we sit on the boundaries (Renee, teacher).

The potential for special education to create barriers to direct involvement with wider-school personnel and processes was recognised by some teachers who felt some of their colleagues had no expectation that parents may wish to work directly with them. The same was considered true for pastoral support, where key teachers assumed the pastoral role normally assigned to whānau teachers and deans. Many parents expressed the thought that there was no need to be in contact with regular teachers.

Simply because you've got that barrier in between, of the IEP, which gives you that information anyway (May, parent).

Students also habitually went to the special education staff or their parents for support; parents would then come and see the key teacher. Very few students talked about any parental contact with wider-school teachers.

4. A limiting factor which was articulated by some teachers and parents was the physical isolation of the special education centres. One building in particular was noted for its position on the extreme edge of the school, with a separate public access. This meant parents often came and went without even walking through the school.

Participant Suggestions.

Many parents thought a meeting of some kind during the year would help with parents' access to and understanding of the learning programmes planned or in progress, including special programmes such as sexuality education. Other meetings could be arranged to get to know wider-school staff (also see cluster [c]).

Proactive Processes. Most parents made comments about special education staff planning or thinking ahead to problems that might arise, or to the next phase in the student's education. Almost all (22) parents believed their ideas were actively sought and accepted respectfully. This pleased parents, as they felt they didn't have 'to fight for every service' (Joanne, parent). There were also wider-school teachers whose approach was valued because they could see problems in advance and broach them in a straightforward way with parents (see also cluster [b]). They felt the processes were student centred and proactive.

Perfect. It's a well oiled machine. You've got people down there who genuinely want to do the best they can. That's the advantage (Richard, parent).

Matt's needs are at the forefront of what everybody involved with him does, as far as special education is concerned. And so because they are focussed on who he is and what he needs and what needs to happen to both achieve and survive, all the pressure is off us...comparatively (Jacqui, parent).

Barriers: Problems with Proactive Processes.

1. Murial (parent) felt she was more involved at a previous school where there were fewer systems in place, and teachers were less proactive and less supported in their roles by specialists. Some commented they had less to fight for at this school. Others tended to sit back a bit.

The teachers have been a bit more proactive... [than me] they have worked out what [objectives] she has achieved and what one's she is still working on (May, parent).

2. The needs of special education students were not always considered when wider-school teachers made plans for trips or out of class activities. This resulted in reactive rather than

proactive situations and opportunities being missed because planning was not inclusive and adaptations could not occur in time.

There is no real opportunity for someone with her needs...No promotion of anything for wheelchair disabilities in the wider-school – it's all under the Special Centre (Hine, parent).

Participant Suggestions.

1. Some parents would like to see more proactive efforts to cater for students in the mainstream, including teachers asking parents to contribute information about how students achieved tasks at home, and how they learnt. These parents and others also felt that increased in-service teacher education for wider-school staff was important, and more opportunities to meet staff should be organised. They felt these processes would lead to more meaningful interchange and better programmes.

Theoretically they would be looking down the track and thinking, "This is something she is going to have difficulty with, I will look at modifying the curriculum and the processes myself, and then I will let you know what I have done." That's the preferred option (Richard, parent).

2. All teachers felt they needed to be more proactive in some areas, and each made suggestions such as improving the timeliness of paperwork, improving evaluation processes, keeping parents better informed of progress, ensuring important participants were present at meetings, and developing agendas.

3. Again, as reported under other clusters, many participants thought some kind of parent-teacher forum would benefit planning and proactive efforts.

School Management and Special Education Management Committee. Overall, parents reported very high levels of satisfaction with management structures, despite being generally unaware of how management and resourcing worked. The special education department convened a management committee, with parent representation from each special centre, which met once or twice each year. This was a direct opportunity to voice opinions and concerns in a forum which included special education senior teachers, the principal and a representative from the Board of Trustees. Analysis of the minutes over the past three years showed that staff reported on the department's activities and raised issues such as wheelchair access, financial concerns and problems associated with roll growth. Parents contributed to support the teachers in the centres with their praise and encouragement of practices.

Missed Chances: Problems with Management.

Though the committee presented an opportunity for parent involvement and representation, minutes revealed parents seldom introduced issues, concerns, or asserted contrary opinions. They did not present issues raised by other parents and were not requested to contribute a report of their own. No parent mentioned this committee during interviews and no teacher suggested it as a forum for increased parental participation. Further, despite being arguably the most pervasive department in the school and the HOD a significant middle manager, the department had no representative on any of the school's guidance or management forums.

Both parents and teachers also identified some management dilemmas:

- The large school size was seen by some parents and teachers as a factor which enabled the provision of extensive special education services, and a range of general opportunities, but size also made it difficult to form personal, mutually supportive relationships.
- Class size also had positives and negatives as seen by some parents and teachers. Some small, senior specialist classes provided an excellent teacher to student ratios, but class numbers were often felt to be too high and rooms too cramped to comfortably accommodate wheelchairs and teacher aides. Large class size was also seen as a barrier to the teacher having time and opportunity to interact effectively with special education students and their teacher aides.
- The school receives specific funding, which allows it to provide improved teacher: pupil ratios for students who receive ORRS funding. However there is no *policy* to ensure this is implemented as intended and no indication that it occurs in practice.

[f]. Supports and relationships. Figure 11 illustrates the sub-themes covered in this cluster. They relate to *understanding and assistance* provided by groups or individuals, the *reciprocal role of the parent* in supporting the student and the school and specific *cultural supports* available.

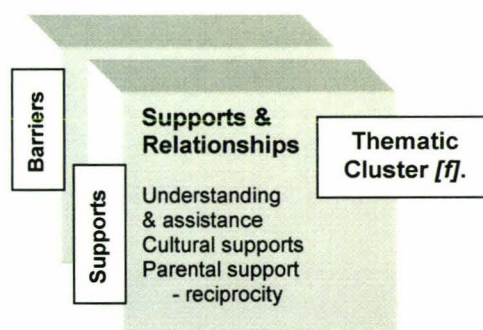


Fig. 11

Understanding and assistance. Parents reported receiving support from many quarters, both personally and through specific support to their children. Most frequently, the students' key teachers or senior staff were mentioned in this regard. There were also individual teachers in specialist curriculum areas who had shown extra goodwill, caring and understanding towards the students. These teachers who built up and maintained relationships with students and

parents came to understand the students' needs and were thereby able to provide appropriate support. Their efforts were also rated highly by their special education colleagues. Two parents commented that Freyberg was literally a staff of just such individual teachers. Jacqui commented on three particularly helpful teachers and then reflected.

It's the staff, those three together, but Freyberg is made up of people like that (Jacqui, parent).

The formal pastoral network of deans and whānau teachers did not appear to play an important role in supporting the parents or individual ORRS funded students. Instead, an informal network of support worked for many parents (see cluster [c]). However, some parents and teachers indicated there was a degree of serendipity in their relationships, which made the outcomes less certain for other parents.

Teachers said they tried to support new parents in particular. They usually met these parents at least once prior to the first IEP meeting. Usually they had met several times. While most parents said they prepared in some way for IEP meetings, they would appreciate more support to do so. As Lauren (a parent) said, "You are more empowered if you are prepared" (see also cluster [b]).

Many (12) students identified support from individual staff which assisted them to achieve their goals.

Freyberg gives you back what you put into it; if you work hard for them then they will work for you (Emma, student).

Barriers: Problems with Understanding and Assistance.

1. Individual support and assistance, especially in the wider-school, depended on the goodwill of individual teachers. There appeared to be no specific system of support.
2. Chance networking meant that some parents may not receive the support they needed.
3. Pastoral supports emanating from the wider-school appeared inoperative for most of these parents. They depended on special education staff or senior management.

Participant Suggestions.

1. More direct, transparent and open lines of support in the wider-school were sought by several parents. Many wanted more interaction with individual staff members who worked with their children.
2. Most parents wanted more support to assist them to prepare for meetings.

Cultural supports. The parents of students from outside the mainstream culture represented in the study (European/Pakeha) were Deaf students and Māori students. Both groups acknowledged the support available from the structures set up within the school specifically for them, although supports were accessed to a greater or lesser degree depending on the wishes of the individuals involved. Two parents and two teachers mentioned they felt the school was well positioned to assist Māori students and families because structures such as Māori rumaki (including immersion classrooms and meeting spaces) provided a culturally appropriate structure and a ‘touchstone’ for many Māori in the school and their whānau. Both of these parents as well as the other Māori parents identified the support and understanding of individuals within the school as significant factors in their comfort about being involved at school. Personal relationships were considered paramount. All parents felt the key teachers did a good job in maintaining these ties. The teachers felt that strong personal relationships were the most significant factor in parental involvement, regardless of cultural factors.

Three Māori parents mentioned the ‘family’ discussion style of the meetings as being appropriate for them and matching their preferred (consensus) style of decision-making.

It’s more of a family forum and its not steered by just one person. It’s a discussion. That’s the type of forum that I particularly like (Hine, parent).

IEP’s were highly significant forums for support for one parent of a Deaf student who had worked for the introduction of New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) as an official language.

Through the IEPs we have changed Deaf Education in this country (Martha, parent).

Barriers: Problems with Cultural Supports.

Two parents identified there was no particular strategy addressing Māori students and disability and they felt support for Māori students and parents should continue to be improved through consultation.

Parental Support: Reciprocity. Many parents and all teachers mentioned that support was a two-way process. They variously believed they supported each other by being open, available, friendly and honest, supporting each others' goals at home and school, sharing information, and providing assistance as promptly as possible. Some parents said they also tried to support the teachers by reinforcing their rules and strategies. For example, Janine said her son was refusing to get out of the pool after school swimming. She began taking him swimming after school at the same pool, to establish some better routines. A few parents mentioned other successful joint efforts regarding medical, personal hygiene, behaviour and learning needs.

Parents variously mentioned they also reciprocated support provided in the wider-school by sharing information about the student (4), assisting with course work (3), supporting homework (3), supporting the teachers' point of view (1), developing attitudes around work ethic (1), understanding and helping to counteract barriers (2), and assisting with curriculum adaptation and access (1). In observed meetings attended by students (see Table 11), parents and teachers both supported and prompted students to understand and participate. Some students also said they relied heavily on their parents' support.

[I] ask Mum what it all means (Kiri, student).

Mum tells me about what happens (Roberta).

Only one parent said what was expected of them regarding school support was arduous. Many parents would prefer greater involvement in supporting their children and advocating for them to achieve the greatest degree of independence possible. Most recognised the balance needed between parental involvement and student independence (see also cluster [b]).

Once your child gets to high school, you've got to let them go and it becomes the school that takes on the responsibility. In management the parents' role is not as important. (Kate, parent & staff).

I'll get the best deal I can out of the system to facilitate her being successful (Richard, parent).

All parents and teachers saw it as an essential parent role to attend IEP meetings. Parents said they were there to inform as well as learn from the staff.

It's a learning process for the parents...because you are learning about what parts they have achieved...Certain parts of it where we've had goals that we've done for home, then that's probably where it's my turn to expand on and teach the teacher (Sonia).

Barriers: Problems with Reciprocal Support.

1. Many parents believed they had more to offer than was currently being utilised. There was not always the opportunity to provide information to staff. Many parents were prepared to be more involved in supporting teachers to understand their child and to assist with programme support in various ways, because for example,

I sometimes find it quite frustrating when I come into the school and I see how he's acting with others, because I know he's just trying to get away with blue murder, and he's being allowed to (Murial, parent).

2. Almost all parents and teachers reported they had few opportunities to work together on agreed objectives. Parents worked on very few objectives. This perception was corroborated by diary entries (Table 10), IEP plan and summary analysis (Tables 7 & 8) and meeting observations (Table 12). They said each had specific things to do and they went ahead and carried them out (see cluster [b]).

[Implementation is]...broken down into who's responsible. You're responsible for these ones and you leave the teachers to follow up theirs and it becomes more individualised (Kate, parent & staff).

There's a component that says this will be done by the teachers, teacher aide and parents at home; it's a consensus thing (Richard, parent).

3. Frequently parents didn't know exactly what school-based strategies for behaviour management or teaching skills were. For example, Joy gave the example of wanting to set similar boundaries at home and school, but she needed more basic information.

When he comes to school is he able to get out of the taxi?...[and]...How long does he have to wait? (Joy, parent).

4. Special education was seen by some parents and teachers to provide many of the supports to classroom teachers that parents might have provided at primary school or other high schools, and the teachers were seen by some parents to have an 'expert status'.

And I put that down to being the fact that it is a unit on its own; that they are the specialised people working in that area and they had the expertise and the knowledge. Whereas in the previous school the teacher was just someone who had an interest and held her hand up, and she used to interact with us a lot and ring us up and we used to go out there a lot, which was good in one way because we knew what was going on a lot more (Murial, parent).

5. Some parents and teachers talked about why variations might occur in parental involvement in the wider-school, including (a) a range of perceived need to encourage student independence; (b) a range of parental motivation or desire to be involved; and (c) the degree of self esteem or confidence which the parent possessed, perhaps related to socio-economic factors and/or their own school success stories. Students mentioned their parents work and other commitments as reasons for limited involvement.

6. Problems with school supports enabling parental reciprocity were also identified and related to 'the students' role', 'IEPs', 'staff roles and responsibilities', 'equity' and 'information flow' and are reported in the relevant clusters.

Participant Suggestions.

1. Many parents and teachers felt reciprocity could be enhanced with improved communication systems, more opportunities to support wider-school teachers and more meaningful parent-teacher meetings. For example, one student was removed from a regular class because she was unhappy. Her mother felt that had the opportunity to observe in the class been offered, she may have been able to support staff and prevent this from happening.

2. Some parents said that they could be more involved with IEP implementation.

3. Homework was an area where many parents felt they could provide increased support to staff and students, although some said they would need assistance to do so. Some students said they appreciated help with homework; parents could act like teacher aides. Macey and Kiri said their parents wanted to help with homework but the students themselves made this difficult by not bringing home text books; they were unable to explain themselves what they needed to do.

4.4.3 Communication / Missed Messages

Communication in this context is defined as those aspects of verbal and non-verbal exchange, written, spoken, and implied, which ensure appropriate supports are agreed, planned implemented and evaluated. Much communication is also of a more general nature and serves to build and maintain relationships as well as the climate in which relationships can flourish. Several modes of communication were cited by parents, and are reported within each of the three frames of reference identified in Figure 5.

4.4.3.1 Thematic Clusters: Communication

[g]. Communication and climate. Figure 12 shows the sub-themes reported in this cluster. The degree to which *openness* and *goodwill and trust* affected the climate and were communicated between participants in the setting is covered in this cluster. The role of *non-verbal communication* in how people interpret the school climate is also presented.

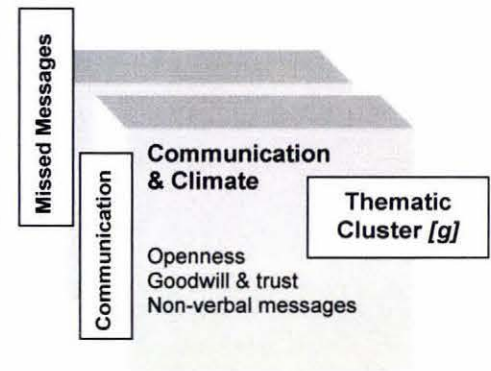


Fig. 12

Climate or atmosphere is frequently communicated non-verbally and at this school was interpreted by the vast majority of parents, teachers and students as welcoming of difference, approachable, friendly and brimming with goodwill; after all “that’s how they end up with all those [special] kids” (Joanne, parent). Difference in culture was also celebrated. Hine said of her daughter, “the school has allowed her Māoritanga to shine.”

Openness. Almost all parents said they came to IEP meetings relaxed, ready to listen and put their point of view, confident that they shared a purpose and matters would be dealt with openly, honestly and fairly. They believed that other team members did likewise.

[It’s] like taking down the barriers and realising that when you go into these things at the IEP...everybody’s there for the betterment of the student; to sit and talk (Mata, parent).

Being able to say how you are feeling and not just sit there and nod (Cathryn, parent & staff).

[To] participate and discuss rather than being there to listen...more of a family forum (Hine, parent).

If anybody’s got an opinion they want to voice, well there’s your chance (Huata, parent).

Almost all parents talked of a journey to reach the point of comfort that they had. Some had shocking past experiences, which had taken time to dispel from their feelings about participating at meetings. Some remained a little anxious about meetings, but said they were fine once the meeting got underway. Observations verified a positive and shared approach to issues in most meetings.

Many parents and all key teachers believed they contributed to the open climate in meetings by raising issues, asking questions and responding promptly and honestly whenever issues arose, not just at the meetings. Parents trusted the key teachers to listen and respond openly no matter what the issue involved or when it was raised. Almost all interviews contained at least one general comment praising key teachers' openness and support both in meetings and during the year.

It's always been very helpful and any problem that we've ever had, I never had any hesitation in having a chat to them (Sarah, parent).

Once you've established that [openness], then they feel they can ring you up and talk to you, and if there's a problem they don't have to be sitting at home worrying about it (Elaine, teacher).

All students who were able indicated it was OK for their parents to talk about their problems at school and some students said they discussed things directly with their key teacher.

You can talk to anyone about what happens (Kitty).

Table 12 (following) depicts amount and type of parent participation at IEP meetings. Parents spoke assertively more than twice as often as they reacted to teachers or other team members. However, they very rarely challenged or disagreed and only 6% of their comments related to the role they would play or the responsibilities they would take in the new IEP plan. Six of the twenty two parents observed took no responsibility for IEP outcomes. Sixteen requested or agreed to taking on an IEP related responsibility on fewer than five occasions during their meetings. Half of the parents made one or no comment about their role in implementation. Almost all parents engaged in some chat or informal conversation.

Table 12: IEP Observation

PARENT PARTICIPATION AT IEP MEETINGS – Amount and type of Involvement

Name	Total Participation: all utterance types		REACTIONS				ASSERTIONS									
			Greetings/Chat		Other		Answered; Agreed; Acknowledged		Asked Question		Asserted opinion; Gave info.		Challenged Disagreed		Took Responsibility	
			Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total	Turns	Total
Kate	46	77	3	8	4	4	14	14	5	9	16	35	3	6	1	1
Murial	62	101	6	14	0	0	26	30	4	5	21	44	2	3	3	5
Michael	64	104	1	2	0	0	28	35	5	8	25	51	3	6	2	2
Joy	147	384	2	4	16	76	53	67	7	10	42	134	4	8	23	85
Henry	31	36	0	0	1	1	22	24	0	0	7	10	0	0	1	1
Lauren	116	158	3	3	0	0	77	78	5	5	31	72	0	0	0	0
Dan	73	120	0	0	0	0	48	49	1	1	24	70	0	0	0	0
Sheena	87	193	8	20	3	6	12	23	6	12	45	119	0	0	6	13
Cathryn	71	153	8	13	3	6	3	4	4	6	51	119	2	5	0	0
Hepa	30	40	1	2	0	0	6	6	6	6	17	26	0	0	0	0
May	86	148	10	24	0	0	35	39	4	8	28	62	0	0	9	15
Abby	81	97	2	3	2	2	42	42	16	18	18	31	1	1	0	0
Sonia	106	207	3	5	5	7	17	21	24	32	52	127	1	3	9	12
Susan	44	52	6	6	0	0	16	18	8	9	13	18	0	0	1	1
Marlene	50	59	10	10	0	0	18	18	11	14	10	16	0	0	1	1
Janine	117	260	3	6	0	0	50	54	13	30	42	150	3	7	6	13
Sarah	115	191	2	3	0	0	59	73	6	11	33	76	4	6	11	22
Richard	33	59	5	10	0	0	8	12	3	5	15	28	0	0	2	4
Diane	10	18	2	4	0	0	2	2	1	1	5	11	0	0	0	0
Martha	79	192	3	6	1	3	15	25	7	13	42	123	8	15	3	7
Joanne	166	241	2	2	0	0	86	89	12	17	62	125	0	0	4	8
Hillary	106	186	3	6	1	3	40	48	20	30	39	90	1	3	2	6
	1720	3076	83	151	36	108	677	771	168	250	638	1537	32	63	84	196
% of Total Participation		100		4.9		3.5		25.1		8.1		50.0		2.0		6.4

Notes: Table 12.

Values for 'Turns' represent the number of times a parent spoke during the meeting.

Values for 'Total' represent the number of discreet comments comprising those turns.

Missed Messages: Problems with Openness.

1. While parents said they could challenge teachers or disagree with their suggestions, in fact this was not common (see Table 12), and not all parents chose to come forward with all problems. Teachers also sensed some reticence and uncertainty at times.

Although I think there is quite a good atmosphere, sometimes there is still that little bit of division (Jenny, teacher).

We probably think we have encouraged them to come to us if they want to know any more. I think they do, do that. Whether they feel confident enough to do it is another matter (Leanne, teacher).

Although some of the teachers wondered how to assist the more reserved parents to “become more confident and assertive” (Jenny, teacher), most (4) said they didn’t plan supports for parents in meetings. Renee did however attempt,

...to really listen, to acknowledge what they are saying, so they know you are interested in their point of view and trying to work with them...The IEP would [also] be far more structured with new parents, so they know it’s very clear and simple and we cover everything.

2. Most students were happy to discuss their problems openly, two however drew attention to the fact that they were under a spotlight.

Special ed. kids and their schooling get more focused on; lots of things get noticed...sometimes it annoys you, but then you understand it is the price you pay because if you took [the attention] away it wouldn’t work (Emma, student).

[But] you get used to it (Kiri, student).

3. Outside of the special education department open communication seldom existed between home and school. However, the few examples given had been particularly successful, and only a few (3) of the participants directly identified openness in this area as a problem.

Participant Suggestions.

As discussed in several other clusters several participants felt more opportunities to build relationships early on in the partnership would help improve communication and increase the sense of openness.

Goodwill and Trust. Most parents and students articulated tremendous goodwill towards the school and teachers, and believed that this was reciprocated, although many parents had no direct specific experiences in relation to the wider-school. Goodwill was identified in general terms and communicated non-verbally in the actions of members of the school community.

It's a wonderful school and everyone works really hard for the students (Martha, parent).

The teachers are all cool; I like it (Kiri, student).

Everything is good; the staff are the best (Laura, student).

It's been brilliant (Johanna, student).

The staff are great, they really are (Susan, parent).

I feel like staying at this school. I like to stay and do stuff here. I love swimming best and I can go to classes (Samuel, student).

They were happy then to overlook minor problems to avoid being "nit-picky" (Richard, parent). Trust was a significant feature of goodwill. Parents all trusted the school to carry out agreed processes and to act fairly on points they had raised. They were seldom disappointed.

The teachers all commented that feelings such as trust build over time and they tried to express their goodwill by actioning concerns promptly, as well as showing that they liked the students and the parents themselves in all dealings with parents over the course of their partnership.

Parents went on trust a lot when it came to decision-making. Teachers acknowledged this and said they tried to provide enough information to parents to enable them to make informed decisions (see also cluster [i]).

[However] you have to trust to a certain extent what the teachers' recommendations are in terms of the academics...because you never fully understand the whole curriculum in all subject areas (Leanne, teacher).

Parents also trusted the school to manage funds and provide quality education within the resources allocated, whereas many expressed extreme distrust of more centralised government control. Some mentioned that they trusted teachers to prepare for and evaluate previous IEPs. They said they were therefore less active themselves than they had been in the past, when they felt they had needed to maintain a diligent eye on proceedings.

The relationship with [the teacher] is such that I know [she] already done all the work and I just need to go and sign it off (Jacqui, parent).

Emma (student) provided the insight that students seemed to want to be there. She also felt there was a strong desire in the school to put things right; when communication did break down, it could be repaired.

The school wants to do things right - they will work at problems when they are pointed out (Emma, student).

Missed Messages: Problems with Goodwill and Trust.

While parents were happy to trust teachers' evaluations, recommendations and the focus they had on achieving agreed outcomes, parents themselves were generally not part of evaluations or ongoing work on objectives, particularly academic objectives. A strong sense of trust may reduce parents' perceived need for involvement.

Non-verbal messages. Parents and teachers used non-verbal clues to gauge whether students were happy or to determine whether something was wrong that needed investigating. Parents appreciated teachers contacting them when they noticed their child was becoming more agitated, sleepy, or any other unusual change of state. Many parents said their children always wanted to go to school and came home happy so they inferred that school was a good place for them.

I truly believe, because she comes home happy that that's my sense that she's happy [at school], and I suppose accepted. I don't really know...I'm not there (Hillary, parent)

Some students picked up and interpreted non-verbal messages too. For example, Jack liked it when IEP team members provided an opportunity for him to have his turn to speak.

When they wait, then I know they have listened (Jack, student).

Observations indicated key teachers and parents communicated goodwill both verbally and non-verbally: They walked close together; they shared stories; they took time to explain things to each other; they smiled; they made jokes and asides; they engaged in chat (usually before or after the meeting); they looked at each other when talking. The meeting style was usually conversational and informal. Almost without exception, teachers listened attentively during the observed meetings: They leant forward towards parents; they asked questions to clarify

meanings; they made brief notes about important points and they responded with nods and smiles.

The meeting rooms provided comfortable, equitable seating arranged around large tables. The main meeting room was large and light, there was no phone connection and it had hot drink facilities. However, it had several entrances, which were used by other staff and students to access an office, a classroom and a kitchenette.

Positive non-verbal messages were received through wider-school services such as the provision of second hand uniforms, and individually through body language and the degree of pro-activity on matters of importance to parents. The fact that the school was an ORRS fundholder, was mentioned by some parents as an indication of commitment to special education.

Missed Messages: Problems with Non-verbal Messages.

1. Negative or tacit messages were apparently received, limiting parents input into important aspects of the students' school life, including wider-school classes and parent-teacher interviews and broader participation in the IEP process.
2. Twice during observations, teachers were over ten minutes late for meetings. Parents were not offered hot drinks and no informal chat occurred before these meetings got underway. The climate in these meetings was noticeably different from those (the great majority) where initial time was taken for general chat. The meetings were shorter, thirty five and forty minutes respectively, and it took around ten minutes in both cases for a relaxed conversational atmosphere to develop.
3. While it was possible to see if meetings were in progress from outside the usual meeting room, there were quite frequent interruptions and a lack of privacy to this room. Most accepted interruptions without verbal comment, but some appeared unsettled.
4. Occasionally teachers appeared to have their own agenda, and missed opportunities to respond to parents' comments, by talking over parents or unnecessarily telling their own stories.

Participant Suggestion.

Elaine (teacher) wanted a more private meeting room.

[h]. Communication and Systems. Despite a generally positive perspective, around two thirds of parents had recent experience of communication problems related to wider-school systems, special education systems or the processes which link special education and the wider-school. All teachers had also experienced some difficulties with communication.

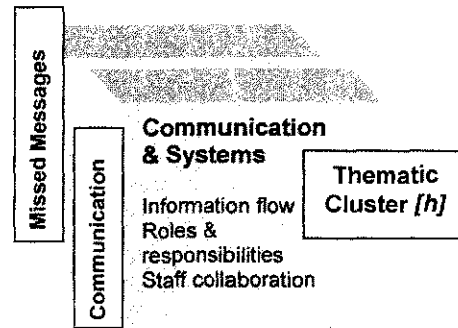


Fig. 13

Figure 13 illustrates the systems or processes which were shown to affect communication between home and school and which are presented in this cluster. They are

- information flow, the patterns of interaction between parents, wider-school teachers, special education staff and the students;
- roles and responsibilities, who appears to take responsibility for which aspects of the students' programmes and progress?
- staff collaboration, staff working together for students and families.

Information flow.

The wider-school. The most common and the only regular, systematic and successful communication with the wider-school was the 'one-way' school newsletter. Other wider-school systems for communication mentioned by parents and teachers were trip or school event information, permission notices, parent-teacher interviews, and school reports. Where parents had been able to provide information directly to individual wider-school teachers by phone or face-to-face, they felt the student had benefited.

Special education. All parents felt two-way systems for collecting and disseminating information quickly worked efficiently via diaries, phone calls or face-to-face encounters between parents and special education staff. Both parents and teachers liked to use diary information as general conversation starters with the students. Diaries were especially valued when students were less able to communicate for themselves or had identified memory or organisational difficulties.

Everyone fossicks around to see what's written in it each day... and... I try to scabble around to write something (Murial, parent).

Tables 9 and 10 show some students with low rates of usage. These were usually students considered by the teachers to be comparatively independent and verbally able. They were

encouraged to take responsibility for communication with home when this appeared appropriate.

The IEP system was generally seen as a good process for ensuring communication occurred and information flowed. Sometimes daily information on a specific IEP objective had been provided effectively via the student diary. Teachers felt however that they tended to focus on wider goals and general information about day-to-day activities. Their view was corroborated by diary analysis (see Table 9). The parents agreed. Most said they were informed in general terms, but not in detail.

Parents on the whole thought IEP meetings were a good opportunity to 'catch up', fill in gaps and share information. Information was observed to flow both ways at meetings. Further, all parents and teachers reported that there were seldom big surprises at meetings because communication was ongoing throughout the year. This was a high point in their partnership. Perspectives relating to the IEP process are reported in greater detail in cluster [b]. When miscommunication resulted in problems, students reported that their parents sorted it out, generally with special education staff, but occasionally also with school management. Students gave no examples of parents communicating directly with regular class teachers.

Some parents mentioned that homework helped them to understand what their children were learning. Where direct contact occurred between subject teachers and parents, parents were appreciative.

Missed Messages: Problems with Information Flow.

1. Most parents wanted evaluation information in advance of meetings. This was seldom forthcoming. There was very limited documented parental involvement in evaluation, although previous objectives were always discussed at the observed meetings.
2. Information was not always provided in a timely manner, examples given related to planning trips, sports information, information about national qualifications fees, and sharing information between special centres and school administration. Timeliness was also mentioned by a few students who felt information didn't always come out long enough in advance in order to plan, for example, to deal with fatigue on a school trip.

Like, depending on what day of the week it is; if it's at the end of the week, you can't do much at the beginning of the week (Emma, student).

3. While key teachers felt ongoing communication was strong with most parents there were others with whom contact was less regular.

4. Information provided in diaries was useful as a general conversation starter. However, it did not generally provide the kind of information which could engage parents and students in learning processes, and some students seldom used them. Only one staff comment in total was made by a wider-school teacher.

5. A few parents, teachers and one student noted that information flow was limited at meetings because wider-school teachers seldom attended and teacher aides generally only had a representative present. The paucity of alternatives for communication with both groups was problematic (see cluster [b]).

6. Many parents didn't feel enough specific information was reaching them, particularly information about school work, decisions and changes of plan, and for the less verbally able students, information about activities during the day. They didn't really know what was happening in the classrooms, including special education centres, and they didn't know when students were experiencing problems in classes. They weren't sure how their children were being taught or what progress they were making.

The information that comes home, I don't think is great, but there's nothing that's really been done that I've felt [was wrong] (Abby, parent).

I suppose, I'm a bit more vague around what actual school work she does at school these days. What are the types of things she does? Because I get ... 'I do no work today' (Sonia, parent).

How much does the teacher use the IEP in planning the programme? ...I'm not too sure on that (Abby, parent).

7. While the parent-teacher interview was a key opportunity to learn more about wider-school classes, parents did not generally go to these. Some stated explicitly that they felt the IEP superseded the need to do so (see cluster [b]).

8. Some (5) parents mentioned that the phone system was frustrating, especially early in the morning. The phones at the centres were not always staffed. No centre had an answering machine and one centre had no phone at all.

9. Students seldom received homework and there was little opportunity for parents to become involved in teaching and learning. Sometimes, when homework was set, parents had difficulty understanding the work because textbooks were kept at school. There appeared to be no particular system which strengthened parents' ability to assist with homework.

10. When left to be independent, students only provided parents with “minimal information” (Sonia, parent). The practice of students taking responsibility for information going home sometimes led to omissions and misunderstandings, which their parents reported as frustrating and at times upsetting, especially when important events were overlooked, or homework uncompleted (see also cluster [b]).

Johanna is not a reliable witness; she may or may not bother to tell me (Marlene, parent).

Participant Suggestions.

According to the school’s “Statement of Objectives” (see Appendix A for school policies) the school is committed to “improving communications within the school and with parents”, an indication that the Board of Trustees and school management would welcome improvements if they were sought by parents or staff. Parents made several suggestions which could contribute to these improvements.

1. Several (9) parents mentioned areas where they would appreciate more information and a better system for the regular flow of information. Provision of basic information including the names of the students’ teachers, a timetable and basic curriculum information were variously recommended and would start the year well. Hine wanted teachers to let her know, “How can I help, so that I am supporting them in what she needs to know?” Her attitude was that it can be hard work teaching these children and if help is provided from home, it can be easier. Students, especially those with social, intellectual or planning problems were seen as in need of better support for ensuring information reached home.

2. Most parents indicated in some way a need for better mechanisms for informing them about progress in class and sharing perspectives with teacher aides and wider-school teachers. Half (12) suggested either some form of individual meeting to discuss progress or a general ‘get together’ to view work, or both, would be worthwhile during the course of the year. Sonia suggested an ‘action sheet’ would be useful to remind everyone of the tasks they said they would perform. She thought this could then be used as part of a mid-IEP meeting for everyone to report on progress.

3. Almost all parents wanted more informal, early contact, which served to put a face to a name and initiate relationships. Some felt there were times when a discussion with the class teacher could have improved understanding in difficult situations. Whānau teachers were also mentioned as important to the students and could be the key to socialisation. Hillary the mother of a student who cannot speak said,

I believe that communication is the key to everything...I would really love just a wee word from her whānau teacher...knowing little things would be lovely.

4. Some parents (5) would prefer more detail in the diary entries, including greater use of diaries for providing a better picture of their child's day and specific dialogue about school work. Some parents suggested wider-school teachers could make quick notes in diaries. Improved augmentative communication systems were sought by parents of two non-verbal students, Hillary and Susan. They felt this would give more voice to their children.
5. Renee wondered if she should develop a checklist to ensure she contacted all parents more systematically.
6. There appeared to be a need to improve the phone system, perhaps to purchase an answer phone.
7. Some parents wanted regular homework for their children set at a level the student could manage. Bringing home textbooks and course content information to assist with homework would be helpful. They also commented they would be able to help more with homework if they knew more about the curriculum themselves and had better connections to teachers.

Roles and responsibilities. The picture of who took responsibility for which aspect of the students' school day was one of considerable variation. There was no documentation indicating what the roles should be. Several individual wider-school teachers and some teaching departments were willing to try new approaches and were seen by the key teachers as especially supportive of students with disabilities. Some parents were also seen by the teachers as more proactive and 'hands on' while others were more reluctant to be involved (see cluster *ff*).

The key teachers believed all matters relating to IEP coordination, facilitation, administration and communication, including the timely production of written plans and evaluations, were their responsibility. They saw their role in the wider-school as one of providing support to subject and whānau teachers and communicating, frequently via support staff, regarding key goals and curriculum adaptations. They believed, in general, it was the responsibility of the class teacher to set, monitor and report on the work of the student in relation to their subject, but doubted that this view was shared by their wider-school colleagues

Missed Messages: Problems with Roles and Responsibilities.

1. While there were some examples of effective inclusion, much of the programming and responsibility for the student was assumed by the special education staff. There was no articulated boundary between the role of the special education and the regular class teachers; it seemed unlikely that understandings were shared.

It's on a case-by-case basis: Some teachers are quite happy to delegate all things to the specialist teachers and all pastoral and all academic issues; and other teachers just accept them as any other student, and they will deal with the parent the same way (Leanne, teacher).

2. Wider-school teachers reported to the IEP process, but were seldom directly involved with parents, either face-to-face, by phone or diary.

3. While many individual teachers produced informative school reports for all students including special education students, the reporting system failed many special education students. These students either received incomplete or incorrect reports or none at all. This was unacceptable to their parents and special education teachers.

I mean all they have got to say is, 'he's behaving himself well in class and he's adapting to the class', something like that, but I've had nothing (Joy, parent).

We try and get reports home so that our students are included. That's not very successful. It's shocking. It hasn't improved at all. So as much as we try it's not a happening thing (Leanne, teacher).

That's our first barrier: educating our teachers [to] the expectation that our students will get a report. We have that expectation, but wider-school teachers don't always have the same expectation. Perhaps they see that we send out our bit of paper collecting information for IEPs. They do that twice a year, why should they also have to do an interview and send reports (Renee, teacher).

4. Teachers did not always follow through on their responsibility for explaining and producing paperwork, specifically evaluations and final IEP plans, in a timely manner. In the case of evaluations, almost all parents said they wanted a better system. However, they had not complained. When paperwork was produced, parents sometimes found it confusing. A few were uncertain which document served which purpose (see Chapter 5, clusters [b] & [i] for discussion).

Participant Suggestions.

1. Several parents pointed to the need for teachers and teacher aides to develop a greater range of skills in order to provide meaningful inclusive learning experiences for all students. These parents and the special education teachers variously reported a need for wider-school teachers to receive more information on student goals, strengths, needs, curriculum adaptations, learning styles, and greater clarification of their roles and responsibilities as well as those of teacher aides, parents, and special education 'key teachers'.
2. Parents felt they could contribute more and in different ways to those currently sought by teachers.

Staff collaboration. There were several examples of strong collaboration between regular and special education teachers. Examples from each teacher emphasised effective communication and mutual understandings as key factors in their success.

The special education teachers all said they tried to spend time with each wider-school teacher associated with their students but often it was the support staff (teacher aides and communicators for the Deaf students) who acted as go-betweens for the teachers. Many parents expressed that teacher aides were key to the endeavours of their children in class. Frequently they were seen as holding more useful information than the class teachers.

Students based at two of the centres carried 'communication books' which were used by support staff to report on progress in regular classes. Key teachers used the information to adapt and modify students' programmes. Occasionally students wrote comments for themselves.

Special Education staff acted as an intermediary between wider-school staff and parents. All teachers reported that almost all parents came to them first, for any matter relating to the school, whether it was directly related to special education or not. The great majority of parents confirmed this.

[They work] through us and it is either face to face, telephone or in the diaries (Elaine, teacher).

It saves time and sanity not to have to go to all the teachers (Cathryn, parent & staff)

Conversely, class teachers also came to the 'key teacher' or head of department to sort out issues regarding students. They did not contact the parents. Parents felt this generally worked very well, but some raised issues. For example May (parent) felt there could have been more...

...cooperation and collaboration [on the inclusion issue]...getting together and discussing the ideas. We didn't actually look at the option of really persevering [with inclusion].

Missed Messages: Problems with Staff Collaboration.

1. The special education teachers felt a wide variance existed in beliefs about roles and responsibilities. They believed there needed to be greater role definition and increased understandings by both themselves and regular class teachers. They believed a greater degree of responsibility needed to be assumed by regular class teachers for the teaching and learning of students with disabilities. However, they felt this was not necessarily realistic without increased support, resources and professional development; they felt their wider-school colleagues had, on the whole, a very limited knowledge of special needs (see also *roles and responsibilities* above).
2. Teachers identified time and work pressures as factors limiting greater collaboration with special education staff and families.
3. Effective collaboration was believed to hinge entirely on the goodwill of individual wider-school teachers; some went the extra mile, some did not. Conversely, Elaine identified that special education teachers are "quite protective of [the students], so part of it is us letting go." Trust was an important factor for Elaine, who would be prepared to let go if she could trust others to "pick up some ownership of *our* [author's emphasis] students."
4. Although there were many examples of informative reporting practice by wider-school teachers, the special education teachers frequently struggled to get quality information from their colleagues about the progress of their students. Problems arose with school reports, IEP evaluations and at other times throughout the year. Wider-school teachers did not use the communication books, which the special education staff tried to use regularly.

Participant Suggestions.

1. Improving teacher understanding of the students was seen by both key teachers and parents as a mechanism for improving proactive processes and responsiveness to teaching and learning needs. The key teachers wanted more opportunities to work closer and offer more support to wider-school colleagues, coupled with management involvement in developing a more transparent definition of roles.

Some parents and teachers suggested improved understanding would also lead to better communication and greater acceptance of interdependence between home and school. Teachers

also wanted to develop better systems for improving their own knowledge of wider-school subjects.

2. As teacher aides were often the linchpin between regular and special education provisions, Leanne felt she needed to improve the teacher aides' evaluation processes; she felt fortnightly updates would be useful, perhaps recorded in an improved format in the communication books. Class teachers could also be encouraged to make comments. Armed with good data, Leanne felt she would be in a better position to keep parents better informed.

I want to have ongoing evaluation without too much of a hassle, without too much writing, but still giving a good clear indication to me as a teacher (Leanne, teacher).

3. Leanne felt it would be good for special education teachers to talk together as a department about finding solutions to the problems of information flow and role clarification. She also felt greater collegiality could be achieved through more interdepartmental contact. Many issues could be dealt with at this level.

4. Emma (student) pointed out that teachers and teacher aides don't often all sit down together and some parents suggested the IEP or other meetings should be more of a forum for staff to share information with each other as well as with parents. Teachers variously suggested that special education 'meet the teachers' events, open nights and wider-school open days had the potential to strengthen communication systems between IEP meetings.

[i] Communication and Relationships. Strong interpersonal relationships between special education staff and parents ensured a solid foundation for good IEP partnerships. Communication was the most important single theme in all the adult interviews. All parents and teachers mentioned the importance of good communication, and everyone said what they had was good almost all of the time.

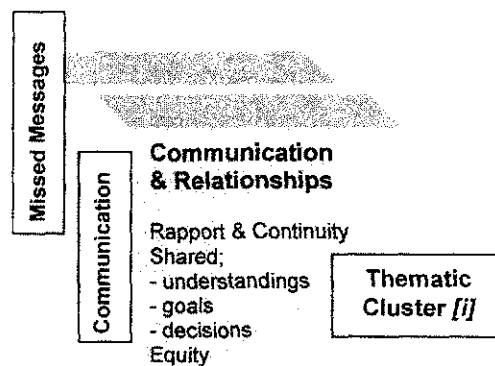


Fig. 14

Figure 14 shows the sub-themes within this cluster. Essential to establishing and maintaining communicative relationships was strong *rapport* between parents and staff, which was significantly enhanced by *continuity* from a stable and committed staff. Findings relating to *shared understandings*, *goals and decision making*, and *equity* in relationships are reported in

this cluster. Most adult participants remarked that they felt good communication came down to a shared, team approach to relationships.

It has to be done as a team... I look at the home based situation. You guys are actively in the school thing. That's two different areas...trying to work together for the benefit of Macey's transition; education (Tipene, parent).

Rapport and continuity. All teachers felt good rapport led to an open sharing of information, which laid the ground work for a more effective partnership throughout the year. They said parents' needs were a priority and tried to be available for them. Parents brought their past experiences and expectations to the new situation; this history needed to be worked through before everyone was truly comfortable. Many parents and all teachers said it had taken time to build partnerships and establish teams; the school was generally able to provide continuity of staff to enable this to happen.

Some (5) parents and teachers had known each other since the students had been preschoolers and everyone found his helpful. Most IEPs built over years towards defined long term goals, and parents generally felt they knew what to expect from meetings and from staff. This continuity strongly assisted the development of rapport and understanding. According to Erma (parent), "It's a building up; an ongoing thing."

We know pretty much how the others think and we get into discussions and we raise issues...[but] I can think of one example where it has taken me the best part of two years...With parents I have known for a long time, the IEP takes on whatever the team is...and the IEP has to mould itself to the dynamics of the team (Renee, teacher).

The teachers and several parents felt new parents needed more support than others, particularly in meetings. They felt that once parents got to know them, they became more proactive.

For the first couple of IEPs with new parents, I let them know its ok for them to jump in or its ok for them to question something (Leanne, teacher).

With new parents its building the relationship getting to know them; them getting to know you (Renee, teacher).

I used to quite clam up. Took me a long time....I must admit I'm way better. I like to get involved in [IEP] meetings. I think it's really important (Mata, parent).

The key teachers were highly regarded. In the vast majority of cases they found this to be a worthwhile provision. All parents were very happy with the communication and support provided currently by their key teacher. Teachers and parents alike liked having one person taking responsibility.

Jenny just always sorts it out (Sarah, parent).

A few (3) parents also made positive comments regarding communication with wider-school teachers. Relationships had been enhanced by (a) the skills of individual class teachers; (b) the positive attitude of these teachers towards problem solving; (c) their approachability; (d) the informal networks developed through sports, music, kapa haka and the like; and (e) the importance, albeit undersubscribed, of parent-teacher interviews.

Missed Messages: Problems with Rapport and Continuity.

1. Several participants felt that opportunities to improve regular school experiences through better relationships with home were missed.

Parents recognised that forming relationships with classroom and whānau teachers was going to be difficult. They noted the nature of secondary schools, large class sizes, and the fact that teachers taught many classes, as barriers to forming strong individual relationships. The teachers wondered whether parents were simply more familiar with special education staff and therefore more comfortable in coming to them or whether there was a sense that they didn't belong in the wider-school.

Maybe they think they are bothering the teachers a little bit; they have enough to do with the regular kids (Elaine, teacher).

2. Special education teachers would like to have more contact with some parents during the year. These were the parents identified by the teachers as possibly less confident; the parents who never rang and seldom wrote in the diary. New parents were identified by some participants as a group needing more support in some areas than they received. This issue also arises in several other clusters.

Participant Suggestions.

1. Some people felt more introductory support around what to expect at meetings could be helpful for new parents, perhaps in the form of a parents' meeting, or perhaps a more individual process of induction.

2. Despite the barriers, many parents wanted more contact and more substantial relationships with wider-school staff.

Shared understandings, goals and decisions. While shared understandings took time to develop and problems could arise from different beliefs, background differences or differences in expectations, decisions were almost without exception deemed to be shared around a common goal and consensus was readily reached. No teacher felt they had the right to make any significant decisions alone and all teachers and parents believed they shared in the decision-making. Parents and teachers said they were regularly in touch regarding upcoming events, changes in plans, the need to develop new objectives, work experience, reminders to follow up actions, or requests for money.

It's what we do. You ring me or I ring you, and we deal with it and we make it work for him, and there's constant and consistent fine tuning going on that makes it work for him (Jacqui, parent).

It was generally felt that teams worked well during meetings and by and large observation at meetings also bore this out (although see 'Equity', following). All but one participant, who wanted more structure, felt meetings were run well with everyone contributing to a conversation. In this situation teachers saw their role as that of facilitator and coordinator.

Making sure everyone gets their say (Scott, teacher).

Sort of bringing everything together (Elaine, teacher).

[It's] what's best for the child (Joy, parent).

It's a give and take (Erma, parent).

[We] address the problem and figure out a different process to see how it can be improved or remedied or whatever... You've got your chance to say something and if you put up that's fine (Tipene, parent).

I think everyone in 99% of the cases is quite happy to come along and have their say and be part of the team and able to raise issues (Kate, parent & staff).

At this school there is more detail in the meeting. We really talk about the subjects (Kitty, student).

In all the observed meetings, the setting of new goals was discussed at length and agreed by all participants. Observations also revealed that parents appeared to particularly enjoy teachers sharing anecdotes about how students were at school, as well as showing actual school work.

What we think are his levels of interest can often be developing into other areas that we haven't really noticed (Murial, parent).

Parents had mixed views on whether they received enough information to understand issues or make decisions. But they generally trusted teachers to help them make decisions where information was lacking, and all teachers used meeting summary sheets to record where more information was required before making a decision (see also cluster [b]). While ten of the twenty two parents observed in meetings asked five or fewer questions (see Table 12), parents said they were satisfied they asked questions until they reached a satisfactory understanding.

If I don't know what they are talking about I normally say, 'I don't understand. Where's she going to benefit from this? Why are you putting her in here?' [It's OK] as long as I'm well informed about why they're doing it (Mata, parent).

I've never come home and thought 'I wonder what that was all about.' I think we ask if we don't know (Diane, parent).

I really feel I'm not knowledgeable enough when it comes to the school side of things. I know Tina very, very well, but not when it comes... to how they teach her. So in the IEP I tend to sit back and listen (Hillary, parent).

The summary addresses some of the issues about not having information to make informed decisions, or things being raised spontaneously (Renee, teacher).

Teachers felt they were sometimes, perhaps rather unrealistically according to Jenny, expected to "be the fountain of knowledge." However, teachers believed it was the parents, and ultimately the students themselves, who must guide the direction of the students' programme and make all the important decisions (see cluster [b]).

Sometimes I don't feel like I'm a fountain, just a little drip (Jenny, teacher).

I'm more a coordinator than the person that's saying, 'This is going to be done' (Scott, teacher).

They know their child far better than anyone else (Renee, teacher).

Missed Messages: Problems with Shared Understandings, Goals and Decisions.

1. Parents and students had very limited opportunity to share in evaluation and preparation processes and their role in implementation was limited. There were not many examples of parents and staff sharing strategies to achieve specific objectives.
2. Some parents felt they had more input with community and transition processes such as decisions about work experience than they had when working more on school based goals. Abby and Joy were among the majority of parents who said they left much of the decision making and planning up to the teachers.

Basically [the teachers] set the challenges and stuff (Joy, parent).

It's usually the teachers who talk about how they are going to achieve [objectives] (Abby).

3. Decisions were frequently made between meetings and there were times when teachers made decisions without notifying or consulting parents. The few parents who mentioned this did not complain at the time. They said they were happy with the decisions but would have preferred being told. Teachers agreed this sometimes happened.

I'd be guilty of thinking everyone can read my mind... coming up with an idea and not dispersing it; just running with it (Renee, teacher).

4. In the observed meetings, all participants presented ideas and at times parents disagreed with the teachers, each other and other team members. However, they never objected to a teachers' recommendation. A few parents did, however, give examples of successfully challenging the teacher.

I actually brought up [removing an on-going objective about grooming] and we wiped it off the whole thing. It was just a carry on and a carry on and that's pointless and irritating (Mata, parent).

Participant Suggestions.

1. Many parents wanted to see more work in progress. This would help with shared decision making as parents would have more information upon which to base their judgements. More regular homework was also suggested as a way to keep in touch with course content and student progress. Some parents wanted more guidance and decisions made about what to do at home.
2. Teachers variously suggested asking parents for (a) written feedback before meetings, (b) suggested agenda items, and (c) written requirements regarding who to invite to attend meetings (see also cluster [b]).

Equity. Both teachers and parents acknowledged that teachers “come to the table with a lot more educational information” (Leanne, teacher). Teachers understood they were in a position of power and believed they took steps to ensure each member of the team had an equal say and understood proceedings. Observations showed that most parents made considerable contributions to meetings and although two parents were not sure whether their opinions were fully valued, all other parents felt teachers did try to equalise power by explaining issues and ensuring conversations were balanced.

Because we don’t know a great deal about some of the things that they are doing...if it sounds a good idea, I say “OK, we’ll try it,” and they will sit down and explain what it’s all about (Erna, parent).

It’s all in plain English; all very basic (Lauren, parent).

It was like the freedom was there for anyone to say anything. That’s pretty important...It’s not I’m the chief and you’re the Indians (Tipene, parent).

The staff believed that where opinions differed it was generally the parents’ opinion that should hold sway; in the meetings observed, parents were almost always given the last word, literally at the end of meetings, and also regarding final decision-making and setting priorities. In most cases parents used this opportunity to simply agree with the teachers, but the opportunity was offered.

Some parents suggested class teachers may be ‘intimidated’ by them as they were quite strong and determined people and held considerable knowledge. Many parents described themselves variously as having become ‘a fighter’, ‘bolshy’, ‘aggressive’ or ‘acerbic’ over the years fighting for provisions for their children. These parents said a weight lifted off them at this school, because services were so much improved. However, they wondered if teachers still saw them as ‘stropky’ special education parents.

Missed Messages: Problems with Equity.

1. Although, as the teachers said, “I am the facilitator, but...I don’t want to control everything” (Leanne, teacher), observations and participant comment, from both parents and teachers, revealed there were several ways that teachers did in fact retain control.

- All meetings observed were conducted at school.
- Meetings were all chaired by the teacher.

- Teachers often had more information than parents about the meeting process and content and about proposals, plans and programmes.
- All teachers had their own styles which set the meeting style and dominated the proceedings of most observed meetings. One parent mentioned she had to adapt to the different teachers' styles. Another said it was necessary to become experienced in the school's "way of doing things" (Erma, parent).
- Teachers controlled the paperwork. They frequently delayed the production of paperwork. They set the agenda which they did not share in advance. Parents did not expect or receive an agenda, so they had no formal opportunity in advance to prepare for or set topics for discussion. Renee and Scott did however illustrate the value of an agenda.

In the middle of an IEP it can sometimes happen [that] you bring up an idea. It's not fair on everyone else (Renee, teacher).

If you go to any meeting and you've had no piece of paper to say what the agenda is or what's being discussed, it's difficult (Scott, teacher).

- Some parents felt they could not participate fully in some discussions because they were trying to read evaluations while discussing new ideas. This occurred in some of the observed meetings and the teachers agreed it was not best practice.

You are putting them on the spot (Scott, teacher).

2. Some students felt equal and that they had choices presented to them. Others felt decisions were made around them.

Sometimes... I feel it was not my choice. I didn't want to do that (Tara, student).

Mum does all the talking, makes up her mind (Kiri).

3. Even though parents generally trusted school processes, they sometimes felt they needed to be careful what issues they raised and how they went about it. For example, when Samuel was removed from a class for what appeared to be a minor act of defiance, Abby, his mother, decided not to complain. She felt that even if Samuel was reinstated, he would not benefit from forcing the teacher's hand. Her belief was that when parents push, teachers and principals "push back harder", making equitable resolution impossible. A small handful of others also said they wouldn't 'rock the boat' unnecessarily.

You choose what is worth fighting for (May, parent).

4. Jacqui (parent) said she felt teachers needed to be careful to treat all parents equally. Her experience had led her to believe that “educated parents get treated differently.”

Participant Suggestions.

1. Two teachers and one parent wondered whether having at least some meetings at home would help some parents to feel more comfortable, “so it’s on their territory” (Renee, teacher).

I’d like to do more of the meetings at home. If it’s a team and you’re talking about power and control, this is our domain (Leanne, teacher).

2. Some teachers mentioned they could use the summary sheet to document discussion, without necessarily putting parents on the spot to make instant decisions, if they felt unprepared, or to note points she had to find out more information for parents (also see *balance*, cluster [b]).

It gives that bit of down time... I really like that (Renee, teacher).

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter detailed findings have been presented as they related to positive and negative aspects of the nine thematic clusters. Each cluster subsumed a set of sub-themes, illustrating aspects of the three major themes, opportunity, support and communication as reflected in the three identified spheres of influence, school climate, school systems and relationships.

An overall sense of shared purpose was apparent throughout the analysis of data and all participants openly shared their feelings on the gamut of interrelationships which comprise the home-school partnership. All parents and teachers made suggestions and expressed a willingness to support changes where improved outcomes for the partnership and the students in general were likely.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The extent to which *collaborative partnerships* exist between parents and the school, was affected differently by different aspects of the school's functioning, in particular, school climate, systems and individual relationships within special education and in the wider-school. Further, broader social and political influences, as illustrated in Figures 3 and 4, as well as change factors such as transitions affect various aspects of the partnerships in different ways. It is difficult then to view 'collaborative partnership' in this situation as a single entity. In this chapter, the major findings will be discussed in relation to the literature with these caveats in mind. The purpose of the study was to identify important features of such partnerships, as well as practical directions for improvement. Following Bronfenbrenner, who believed in the unrealised potential of many environments to further develop and nurture the developing child with disabilities (Hildebrand et al., 2000; Sontag, 1996), the discussion will attempt to meet these aims.

5.2 THE RELATIONSHIP MATRIX

The model of home-school relationships presented in Figure 5 provided the framework for analysis of data and will be used to discuss the major findings. However, whereas the findings were reported primarily in terms of themes, the horizontal rows of the matrix, the discussion and conclusion will be presented with a focus on the spheres of influence, the vertical columns of the matrix. The purpose for this change in emphasis is to clarify a possible approach for action. By identifying the spheres as separate entities and approaching them as a 'mega-cluster' they may become conceptually manageable in terms of a practical action framework. However, particularly regarding the larger discussions, positive action could well require attention to each of the nine clusters individually.

5.3 OVERALL POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS

The parents and students in this study were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences at Midland High, providing a strong platform from which to implement improvements; an imperative for this study established in accordance with the thinking of Ainscow (1998), Clark et al., (1998) and Snook (2003). Overall they were content with the opportunities, supports and communication structures that operated in the school. Although the mix of students in the present study is more complex, this finding echoes the results of McLachlan (1998, cited in Fraser, 2000) who reported high levels of parental satisfaction with a secondary school special education unit. The many other reported studies on parent satisfaction are variable. For example Garriott et al. (2000) and Wolfendale (2002) report considerable parent dissatisfaction but Oleniczak (2002) and Thomson and Rowan (1996) reported that parents were generally happy with their schools in relation to IEPs.

Almost all participants in the current study were also critical of some aspects of home-school relationships and IEP practices, and in many cases proposed possible solutions, many of which concurred with the current literature, for example regarding the need for improved face-to-face communication. Negative attitudes and/or limiting practices were seen to be in play in conjunction with positive dimensions of the same phenomena in many of the clusters, but parents were prepared to overlook the negatives in many cases. There were also many broader conundrums which meant the overall potential for fully collaborative partnerships, as described for example by Blue-Banning et al. (2004), would remain limited. The time it took for change to occur, as discussed by Fullan (1991), the pervasiveness of politics in special education (e.g. Olssen et al., 2004; Slee, 1998) and the lack of inclusion in society generally (e.g. Ballard, 1998; Hamill & Everington, 2002; Neilson, 2000) were three problems which were beyond the power of the school alone to solve.

In other cases limitations presented that were not mentioned by the participants, but which resonated with the literature, for example with the thinking of Cherryholmes (1988), O'Neill et al., (2004) and Peters (2003), regarding undefined social constructs and the influence of ideologies. Finally, there were aspects of this case, which appear unique and have resulted in local dilemmas, and in some instances, positive resolution. For example, parents were very pleased with the school's efficiency in managing funds, and teachers found their locally developed 'summary sheets' effective.

In line with much of the research literature (Decker & Decker, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002; Taylor, 2000), students in this study were adamant that having their parents involved with their schooling was both worthwhile and necessary. Further, these teenagers *liked* their parents to be involved, a finding which reinforces assertions in the literature that student morale is improved by parental involvement (Berger, 2000; Deslandes et al., 1999; Diffily, 2003). It appears then, that despite the need to ‘cut apron strings’, students benefit from the positive parental involvement at this school. Further, and in line with other recent findings, these parents felt they could be (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999) and were prepared to be (Berger, 2000; North & Carruthers, 2005; Robinson, 2004) more involved. It follows then, that both groups would benefit from improving the quality of these relationships, an important theme in the writing of many authors (e.g. Coil, 2003; Decker & Decker, 2003; Gestwicki, 2000; Robinson, 2004).

5.4 SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

5.4.1 School climate

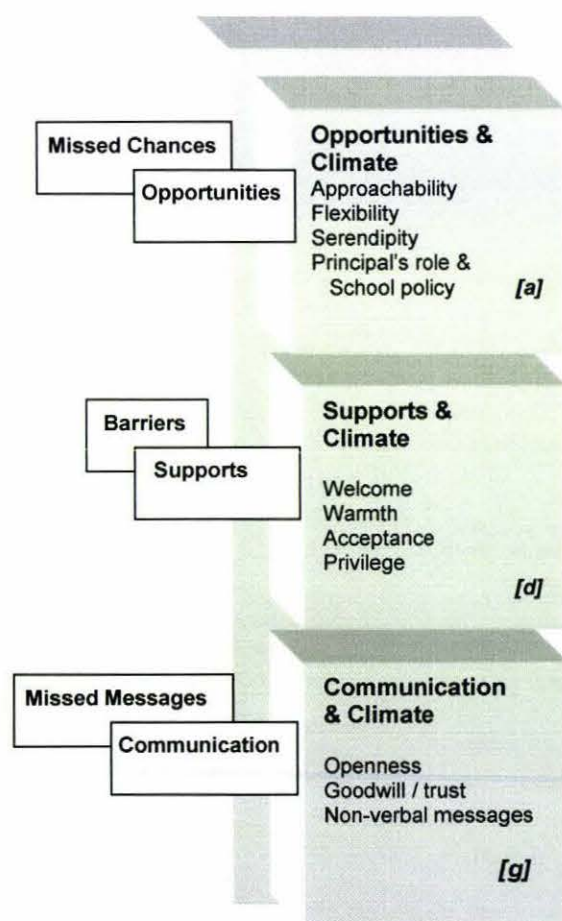


Fig. 15 Sphere of influence: School Climate

Figure 15 represents this column of the research matrix (Fig. 5). It indicates the aspects of school climate which will be discussed in this section.

Cluster [a]. Opportunities and Climate.

The flexible style adopted by special education staff, the principal and some senior staff ensured parents felt they had the opportunity to approach them at any time. The principal was seen as a good role model in this regard and school policy assured the community of its intention to work in partnership with parents and whānau. These are all features of the sound partnerships described by various authors (e.g. Decker & Decker, 2003; Rock, 2000).

However, even though there were examples of a flexible style adopted within the wider-school, and the majority of parents believed they *could* approach wider-school teachers, or become involved in wider-school activities, they seldom did. The teachers believed this was a feature of secondary schools in general. Even though Lovey (2002) suggests this need not be so, analysis by authors such as Bailey (1998) and Reschly (1995) point to exclusionary forces which are likely to exacerbate the general problem of high school approachability for parents who have children with disabilities. Reschly contends this may be especially so for students who have strong affiliations to special education centres. While both parents and teachers felt there were clear advantages to having strong special education support, the ambiguities created by a dual system, as described by Booth (1998) and Mitchell (2000), have not been resolved in a fashion which provides genuine approachability to all aspects of school for these parents.

Whether parents simply chose to bypass existing opportunities for contact with the wider-school, or whether the opportunities were in fact real is a moot point. The discussion on parent-teacher interviews (cluster/[h]) reveals why opportunity may be little more than chimera, and the discussion on special education as an intermediary (cluster [h]) suggests the *ownership* of these students by the 'Special Ed. Bubble' (as Emma described it in cluster [b]) may leave little room or perceived relevance for general educators. New parents had specific problems approaching staff which will be discussed in later clusters.

There is a need to ensure that the positive climate described by participants is translated into real opportunities for parents and students across the school. In agreement with the thoughts of Buswell (1999) and Decker and Decker (2003) there may be a need to instigate greater advocacy from the principal, coupled with increased opportunities for professional development and staff collaboration (see cluster [h]), focussing on promoting a 'rights discourse' (Booth, 1998; Neilson, 2000). The sense of approachability and vision should not stop at senior management or reside with the special education department or committed individual teachers. Such opportunities should not neglect the dual concerns of people with both a disability and minority cultural status (Parrette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Taylor, 2000) in particular young Māori students with special needs (Bevan-Brown, 2002; Macfarlane, 2000; Wilkie, 2001).

While the school's policies were strong on rhetoric and goodwill, they were weak in key areas that could have promoted wider-school contributions to students with disabilities, particularly the areas of inclusion, transition, staff collaboration, and advocacy. In line with the thinking of Decker and Decker (2003), policies would need to be strengthened to support the increased promotional role of the principal. Stangvik (1998) suggests special education policy may

frequently be generated to reflect the needs of schools and teachers, rather than the needs of the students. By engaging parents with experience of disability in policy development, more practical and inclusive documents are likely to emerge. The special education management committee (see cluster [b]) could play an increased role in mustering parent opinion and promoting more transparent policy. For example, clear policy regarding transition may ease some of the apprehension parents feel as transition from school approaches (see cluster [b]).

While flexibility was an important feature of the relationships, the teachers believed the compulsory aspects of the ORRS provision limited this flexibility. The teachers' position is echoed in the literature by Friend and Cook (2003), who believe collaborative partnerships cannot exist effectively where elements of compulsion exist. The teachers had developed a system of 'summary sheets' to enable them to work around one issue, that of 'measurable objectives' (see also, cluster [b]). Olssen et al., (2004) and O'Neill et al., (2004) believe the tight administrative requirements of the MOE (MOE, 2003e, 2004c; Manager Eligibility, personal communication, September 4, 2003) have arisen from the ideologies of the 'new right'. It is possible that partnership styles better suited to the needs of individual teams (Peters, 2003), including those for Māori families (Macfarlane, 2000), and those nearing transition (Fish & Evans, 1995) could develop if the requirements were loosened in favour of less managerial processes and greater true collaboration amongst the actual participants, an approach advocated by Friend and Cook (2003) and Turnbull et al. (2000). An aspect of flexibility seldom encountered was the need for teachers to deal with parents challenging their decisions, particularly in relation to academic objectives and decisions in the wider-school. Although this was not seen as a problem by the participants, the discussions in clusters [b], [g] and [i] suggest why this might be so.

While participants engaged in considerable analysis of their home-school relationships during the interviews, most attributed at least some of the positive aspects of their experience to serendipitous events. Conversely, Deslandes et al. (1999) asserts that parents of students who are not doing well may attribute this to misfortune. These parents tend to disengage from school processes. Deslandes et al. contend parents who feel they have influence remain engaged. Others, in the view of Harry (1992) for example, can become merely passive recipients of school practices. History tells us their experiences are not always serendipitous and the problem can be exacerbated for culturally diverse families (Kalyanpur et al., 2000).

Perhaps, as some participants suggested, when schools are believed to be doing a good job, parents trust more to the school and are less inclined to worry about detail, seek alternatives, or

analyse their good fortune. However, when things go wrong, there remains an unanalysed barrier preventing resolution of the so-called misfortune (Deslandes et al., 1999). It is also difficult to analyse how to encourage the participation of those less involved or more 'unfortunate' if chance is believed to play a major role. It is important, therefore, to involve parents in all processes, including assessment and evaluation, class placement and policy making, in order to increase their level of understanding of these processes, thus improving their ability to analyse both their positive and negative experiences and gain conscious control over educational decisions for their children (see also cluster [b]). Frequently however, the parents were not involved in many of these processes, and may not have had the opportunity to choose whether or not to be involved (see clusters [a] and [b]).

Cluster [d]: Supports and Climate. All parents were warmly welcomed and accepted as part of the team in the special centres, by both staff and students, whether they were arriving for meetings or a more informal visit. Other students, whānau and friends were also very welcome, although parents and students did not usually invite others to meetings. The school generally accepted and even celebrated difference, and fellow students did not appear to object to the privileges bestowed on some of those with disabilities. The principal was seen as very welcoming, and the students were greeted positively by members of the school community in the public spaces of the school. However, acceptance did not permeate the whole school, especially many classrooms and mainstream activities, and parents remained largely disconnected from the wider-school. These findings reinforce the beliefs of the post-modernists, who would view special education as a structure for maintaining the 'otherness' of students with disabilities, and inclusionists, who would view this situation as *integration* (see glossary) rather than *inclusion* (e.g. Ashman & Elkins, 2002; Cherryholmes, 1988; David, 2004; Dorn, 2002; Gutek, 2004; Paul & Cranston-Gingras, 2002; Smith, 2004; see also clusters [b] & [e]). In this analysis, privilege can also be seen as a structure for reinforcing 'otherness', and can act as a barrier to inclusion and learning, although it may be deemed beneficial in some important way. For example, a fragile student leaving class early to avoid corridor crowds also loses the opportunity for social contact with that crowd. While it is important to provide privilege where it is needed and wanted, it is essential that students are allowed to develop as regular teenagers as far as possible. As pointed out by a parent, over protection and dependency could well be unwelcome effects of privilege, the appropriateness of which needs to be carefully considered.

Some parents were not happy about attitudes which were occasionally expressed towards their children. Relief teachers, who were not part of the culture of the school, were sometimes

mentioned as not understanding the rights of students; there were many examples also of permanent staff subtly, and not so subtly, excluding students with disabilities (see clusters [b] & [h]). Further, and in a slight reversal of fortune, the warm school climate that accepted difference appeared to be changing a little, as the principal endeavoured to improve the school's image in the community, through enforcing greater uniformity.

The need to provide professional development opportunities for relievers was highlighted, given the high numbers of diverse students in the school. It is important to remember the 1989 Education Act which specifies students' rights to attend and parents rights to choose (Davies & Prangnell, 1999; Mitchell 2000). Where participation is still viewed as a privilege it needs to be seen as a right. Professional development which clarified the law would be important for any group in doubt of any student's rights in the school. However, a more in depth analysis of attitudes and expectations related to all teachers' roles and responsibilities may assist teachers and parents to move together towards mutual goals (Thomas et al., 2001; also see, cluster [h]).

The present cohort of secondary students is the first to spend their whole school life in the context of the 1989 Education Act. While the advent of a new era in education was a reasonable hope, school communities, and the wider community into which the students emerge, were not always experienced as accepting. In agreement with the views of Arthur and Bailey (2000) and Paul, French et al. (2002), it appears there is an urgent need to promote caring community and citizenship values, without which the prevailing discourses may further marginalise groups most in need of community support.

Cluster [g] Communication and Climate. A sense of mutual trust and goodwill is essential to the establishment and maintenance of collaborative partnerships (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Bronfenbrenner, cited in Sontag, 1996; Friend & Cook, 2003). Unlike the Massey University (2002) study which found high levels of mistrust, especially around resource allocation, parents in this study spoke of high levels of trust and goodwill. The open climate at IEP meetings and generally throughout the year and a pervasive sense of goodwill and trust, conveyed both verbally and non-verbally, apparently allowed parents to relax and join in productive dialogue about anything they wanted with their key teachers. The fact that the school was an ORRS 'fundholder' sent a message to parents that this school was committed to special education.

Most participants believed that parents could challenge teachers' decisions if necessary, but in a spirit of goodwill, preferred not to do this very often. However, while teachers worked hard to ensure that parents felt confident to speak openly, they sensed a reticence in some parents, and there were some parents who reported they were selective about which issues to tackle. Two factors in particular seemed to contribute negatively to the perceived phenomena of trust and goodwill. Firstly, the literature is clear about parents' need for sound information on which to base their responses and decisions (e.g. Berger, 2000; Epstein et al., 2002; Fraser, 2000; Moltzen, 2000; North & Carruthers, 2005). However, they frequently had limited information on which to make decisions (also see clusters *[h]* and *[i]*) and were possibly obliged to trust the 'expert' knowledge of the teachers. Secondly, because the parents did not want to be 'nit-picky', it is possible that their goodwill has at times militated against open discussion, which could have led to more acceptable solutions. For example, in a situation where Samuel (student) was removed from a class ostensibly for a minor misdemeanour, trusting to the teachers to make the right decision actually resulted in less parental involvement and a less satisfactory outcome for the student. Although two students felt exposed when their parents intervened at school, almost all recognised their parents' need to discuss their needs openly; a better outcome may have resulted for Samuel if his mother had felt more equal and thus more confident to challenge the school (see also cluster *[i]*).

As evidenced by the literature (Berger, 2000; Friend & Cook, 2003; Lytle & Bordin, 2001), non-verbal messages appeared to play a significant role in the quality of interactions and the development of relationships. This is to be expected given that in the creation of shared meanings, the spoken word accounts for less than ten percent of meaning in any conversation (Miller et al., 1988, cited in Berger 2000). In the setting of the IEP meeting nuanced messages may be received as welcoming or unwelcoming, respectful or offhand through a variety of channels such as the privacy and warmth of the meeting room, whether the teacher appeared relaxed, smiled a greeting or met the parent at the entrance. The observed meetings afforded the opportunity to see the effect of non-verbal behaviour on meeting climate. Generally meetings exuded a positive communicative climate. Parents appreciated informal chat, anecdotes, a hot drink and a pleasant environment. However, when teachers were late, meetings were less relaxed and shorter, drinks were not offered, and the teacher was more 'businesslike'. Further, the usual meeting room, which was not private, may have also dampened parental contributions; the literature certainly suggests this is likely to be the case (Berger, 2000; Coil, 2003; Friend & Cook, 2003; Rock, 2000; Salend, 1998). Observations highlighted the need for teachers to consider carefully the messages they send via their various actions, not just the words they speak.

Few examples of open communication between parents and wider-school staff were reported, but only a very few participants identified this as a problem (see cluster [h]). Most were highly congratulatory of how open the school was. However, they were clearly discouraged from taking part in important aspects of students' school life such as parent-teacher interviews (see cluster [b]). Some were also reluctant to complain about processes which were unsatisfactory to them, such as shared decision-making (see cluster [i]), or poor provision of information (see cluster [h]). What put parents off direct contact with wider-school teachers? Were parents naturally reticent or passive? A great deal of literature indicates that parents often play a passive role (Altemueller, 2001; Bird, 1998, cited in Baker, 2002; Garriott et al., 2000; Peters, 2003). However, this did not seem likely with these parents, because of the confident way they interacted with special education staff. Further, there was certainly nothing in the school policy to suggest parents should stay away. In fact all policies pertaining to this group of students specifically mentioned developing strong partnerships with parents. There could therefore be some tacit process or processes operating, which kept them at a distance. Perhaps, as proposed in cluster [b], many parents saw direct communication with wider-school teachers as largely irrelevant or overly time-consuming. Some may have been limited by the school's inattention to their cultural understandings, as suggested by two parents and considerable literature (Bevan-Brown, 2003; Macfarlane, 2000; Parrette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Taylor, 2000).

Following Derrida and Foucault (Gutek, 2004) other post-modernists such as Cherryholmes (1988) would point to the devices of the dominant group, which act to marginalise a sub-group of the school community, in this case, those students with disabilities and their families. These thinkers would recommend a process of deconstruction to identify the offending structures. Dorn (2002), Franklin et al., (2004), and Neilson (2000) would point to dominant discourses on disability, which remain largely exclusionary and, Nadesan and Elenes (1998) suggest, undemocratic. It is likely then that assumptions, such as those that generate all the goodwill in these partnerships, are underpinned by social structures and discourses, which also work to control and disempower already disadvantaged participants (David, 2004; Paul, French et al., 2002). These may include limiting attitudes towards inclusion (Ballard, 1998, 1999), teacher control over key aspects of processes (e.g. Fraser, 2000) and ideological control of the IEP process through the MOE, as described in general terms by Olssen et al. (2004; see also clusters [b], [f] and [i]). It is hopeful that Neilson (2000) at least believes that discourses in this country can be changed, as did those parents who sought better channels of communication (see cluster [h]) and greater inclusion (see cluster [b]). In agreement with this belief, Nadesan and Elenes (1998) promote the establishment of a more democratic approach to schooling.

At this level of the analysis, which is related to the communication of school climate, it would appear greater attention needs to be placed throughout the school on communicating understanding and respect for diversity, in particular diversity of ability and of cultural understandings (Bevan-Brown, 2003; Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Macfarlane, 2000; Parrette & Petch-Hogan, 2000; Taylor, 2000; Wilkie, 2001). Parents need to feel unimpeded in their relationships with every aspect of the school, not just ‘special education’, which may itself be excluded from mainstream activity through the same structures discussed above (also see clusters [e] and [h]). However, respect must also extend to those families who do not wish to be involved, or who only want limited involvement. This caveat must extend to people from different cultures who may feel school is not their domain, as well as to stressed families and those at differing stages in their family’s life-cycle for whom increased involvement is not practical. As emphasised by Friend and Cook (2003) compulsion is not part of collaborative partnership.

5.4.2 School Systems

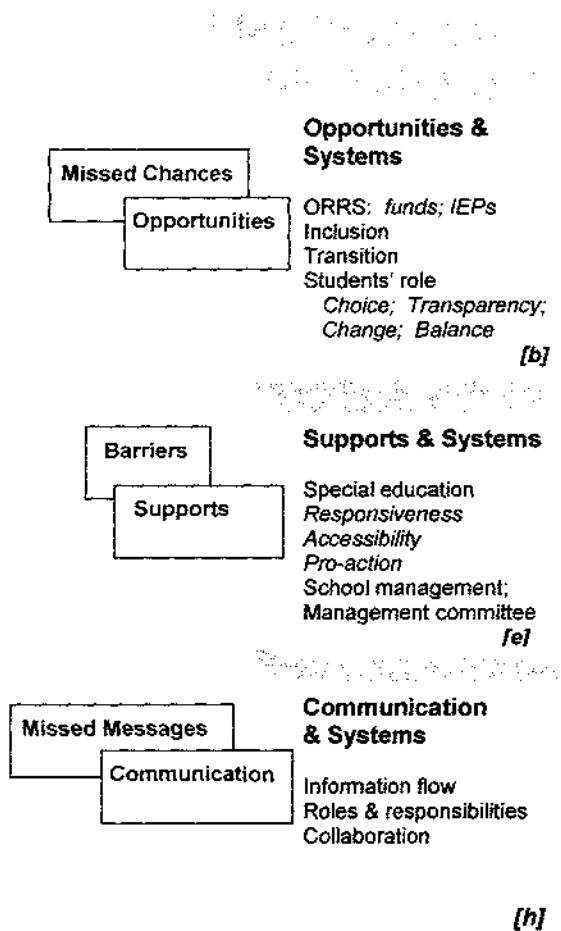


Figure 16 represents the *systems* column of the research matrix (Fig. 5). It shows those school-based systems affecting home-school relationships to be discussed in this section.

Cluster [b]. Opportunities and Systems.

ORRS Fundholding: Funds management. Participants were overwhelmingly positive about the opportunities presented by school management of funds; they would choose the fundholding system over any other they had experienced. School fundholding was seen to be more directly accountable, flexible, transparent, efficient, more responsive to the changing needs of the students, and more conducive to good relationships with parents. Although Wylie (2000) recommended a less fragmented system across the country, greater consultation may have revealed the value of the

Fig. 16 Sphere of influence: School Systems

fundholding process in some schools. This is likely to be particularly so in secondary schools, where co-ordination is already a significant issue, and where specialist expertise exists among the special education staff. Further, the current study shows that these parents trusted the school to allocate resources fairly, unlike the parents in the Massey University study (2002) parents who did not trust the SES (now GSE) to do this.

A more flexible relationship between schools and the MOE was the preference of the teachers; reduced MOE control of the fundholder system would allow schools to investigate local solutions collaboratively with those most closely involved. As it stands the MOE, whose bureaucracy is predicated on competitive and individualistic precepts (Marshall, 2000; Olssen et al., 2004), maintains constructs which prevent the full and equitable participation of parents in educational decision-making for their children. These include restrictive controls on how meetings are to be conceptualised, how resources are to be allocated and how documents are to be formatted (e.g. MOE, 2003d; MOE, 2003e; MOE, 2004c; see also cluster [g]). Efforts to deconstruct limiting discourses and structures and create greater transparency in IEP implementation and resourcing processes would enhance parents' understanding of these processes and potentially lead to more informed decision-making.

ORRS fundholding: IEP process. One major opportunity for involvement with the school accessed by all these parents was the IEP process. The IEP underpinned the supports provided by the special education teachers for every student, but as this discussion reveals, provided only variable opportunities for effective communication.

Choice. Choice in this context was limited to individual decision-making within the constraints of a strong state agenda (Olssen, Codd & O'Neill, 2004), compliance regulations (e.g. MOE, 2004c; District Manager, personal communication, May 21, 2004; Group Manager, personal communication, October 30, 2003; Manager Eligibility, personal communication, September 4, 2003), pre-existing attitudes (e.g. Ballard, 1998, 1999; Smith, 2004) and social constructs (David, 2004; Paul, French et al., 2002). As exemplified by Moltzen (2000) and Mitchell (2000), choice was a term high in the rhetoric of the neo-liberal agenda, which related to the IEP process in pre-determined ways. As signalled by the discussion above, there were significant exceptions to a general finding of satisfaction with IEPs. These participants concurred with the disquiet in the literature about IEP format and implementation, and implications that a different format might suit some situations better (e.g. Fraser, 2000; Peters, 2003; Ryba & Anan, 2000; Menlove et al., 2001; Thomson & Rowan,

1996; Wisnewski, 2002). All teachers objected in at least one way to the control aspects of the IEP process, and several participants would prefer a more holistic, flexible format. For example Macfarlane (2000) and one participant suggested the hui (see glossary) as a suitable format, others suggested 'transition plans' rather than IEPs for some, and Peters (2003) recommends a less socially prescribed process, where expectations of the various partners were not pre-set and limiting. However, all teachers and almost all parents valued the IEP process as providing an important framework of opportunities within which to develop supports and, to a lesser extent, communication processes, and plan student programmes. Most were highly satisfied and most said they would choose this or a similar process even if it were not compulsory, indicating increased flexibility rather than a completely different system would be welcome in this school.

While most parents had some, generally limited, involvement in IEP implementation, they were very seldom involved in collaboration with teachers between meetings, or planning and evaluation prior to meetings. Despite many parents indicating they felt the preparation and evaluation phase was important and that they would like to be more involved, teachers took on the bulk of the responsibilities and made most of the planning choices. It was not clear whether parents chose their degree of participation. Limited involvement may have been a practical approach for a variety of personal, cultural or life-stage reasons. However, limited parental participation in IEP processes is a strong theme in the literature (e.g. Altemueller, 2001; Garriott et al., 2000; Peters, 2003) and Peters describes a tacit agreement which appears to exist about the roles and responsibilities of parents and teachers. The issues relating to choice of involvement during the preparation and evaluation stage of the IEP cycle could be improved in this setting by implementing the suggestions of various participants to (a) jointly develop an agenda; (b) develop a preparation sheet with key questions for parents, such as where they wanted the meeting to be held, who they wanted to attend and what they wanted to discuss; and (c) ensure parents were involved in evaluation by asking for feedback in advance, including their comments in the evaluation document and ensuring the completed document was in their hands well ahead of the meeting.

Transparency. Teachers pondered just how to gather the best quality information and how to present it in a format that was informative, yet tactful. It was unclear whether they achieved the best possible result, although portfolio presentations of student work were received favourably by parents. Improvements in on-going tracking of objectives were suggested by some and would provide the basis for better information to parents throughout the year.

Limited general educator attendance at IEP meetings is a recognised issue (Thomson & Rowan, 1996; Martin et al., 2004) and this school found similar logistical challenges to those reported by Huefner (2000) and Menlove et al. (2001). Despite significant benefits accruing to parents when general educators attend (Martin et al., 2004), and the MOE assumption that this is standard practice (MOE, 1998b), no wider-school teachers attended any of the observed meetings and no-one expected them to, although almost all meetings utilised reports from class teachers. Further, although parents said they could invite anyone to the meetings, they seldom did. For example, although many would have liked more teacher aide and wider-school teacher input, they did not appear to have requested this and there was no transparent system for how this could happen.

Perhaps there were also unspoken rules about why parents did not make more requests (see clusters [g] and [i] and *choice* above) and why wider-school staff did not attend. As discussed in cluster [h] and in agreement with a bulk of literature, clarification of roles and responsibilities (e.g. Moltzen, 2000) and a discussion on improving communication channels in order to share perspectives (e.g. Decker & Decker, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002) would enhance the transparency of evaluation and attendance processes. The parent suggestion of targeting particular staff depending on the students needs at the time would have the advantage of increasing the number of important perspectives at the meeting, without making it an unwieldy event. It could also be possible to work around the schedules of a few extra staff.

Although most parents indicated that the cyclical nature of the IEP process and unspoken expectations, as described by Peters (2003), ensured they knew most of what would be covered at meetings, there was no transparent system ensuring this was in fact the case. There was a particular difficulty for new parents, who often struggled to get their heads around who the staff were, how the school systems worked and what to expect at IEP meetings. There were no agendas, although these were frequently recommended in the literature, for example by Moltzen (2000) and Salend (1998), and because they were only cursorily involved in planning, implementation and evaluation, many parents did not know how their children were progressing between meetings. Further, they were unable to prioritise items to avoid rushed discussions of matters arising towards the end of the meeting. Following the opinions expressed in the literature (e.g. Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; MOE, 1998b; Moltzen, 2000; Rock, 2000; Sadler, 1989; Taylor, 2000; Thomson & Rowan, 1996), it is likely that these shortcomings limited the preparation parents could make for meetings and subsequently the quality of the contributions they could make (see also cluster [i]). Some of these shortcomings were acknowledged by the teachers and all adult participants wanted to make improvements.

Parents were sometimes uncertain about how the different IEP documents and service agreements fitted together, and how resources were allocated. Teachers were also often slow to produce paperwork. As discussed further in cluster [i], and later in this cluster, teacher control over paper work may contribute to the disempowerment of parents and to the enhancement of the 'expert' status of the special education teachers (e.g. Fraser, 2000; Harry, 1992). A more inclusive approach would be to ensure that all documents were explained in such a way as to facilitate parental participation, and also to ensure all drafts were labelled and produced in a timely manner, affording parents the best opportunities to make amendments. Further, a greater understanding of how resources were allocated may assist parents to consider and propose alternatives which they were not in a position to do without the basic information.

Balance. The dilemmas involved in achieving balance in the IEP process arose in several ways:

1. The diaries were used heavily for information rather than discussion of strategies or collaboration on implementing plans, and more often by teachers than parents. A change in emphasis in the use of diaries could close a significant gap in the on-going collaboration between parents and teachers.
2. Diary entries and interchanges at meetings were generally positive, but some parents and students felt there was occasional unnecessary negativity. Deslandes et al. (1999) and Epstein and Hollifield (1996) have shown the importance for student progress of parents reinforcing learning at home; balanced diary comments would help parents maintain this as a positive and constructive process.
3. The balance between promoting student independence and on-going collaboration with parents is an important concern. This dilemma was exacerbated as students approached transition from school. Decisions relating to each student need to be made bearing the two sets of needs in mind (see also *the student's role*).
4. The MOE requirement for measurable objectives limited teachers' freedom to report their actions on a broader front, while parents liked the small objectives because they could see an achievable step. There is literature supporting the parents' point of view and quantitative perspective (e.g. MOE, 1998b; Timmons, 1996). Promotion of ecological and qualitative outcomes is also supported by many authors (e.g. Moltzen, 2000; Quinn & Ryba, 2000; Reschly, 1995). This tension illustrates the theoretical and philosophical dilemma inherent in this study (Clark et al., 1998) and supports the need to adopt a balanced, eclectic approach (see Fig.1) to ensure the wishes of both groups are met. In line with post-modernist (e.g. Pring, 2000) thinking an increased degree of trust between the MOE and the school would also enable

the teachers to format IEPs in ways which were most appropriate for the particular student in their particular environment at the specific time of the meeting, in a model similar to that proposed by Sailor (2002).

5. The potential for stigma to be attached to special education processes was recognised, and a discussion of the balance between special and inclusive education practices is provided in *inclusion/integration* (below).

6. Fraser (2000) and Martin et al. (2004) describe teacher control as a barrier to equal partnership. In this study, parents' restricted access to planning, evaluation and implementation limited the range and depth of knowledge they brought to the meetings; the balance of power, control and knowledge resided heavily with the teachers (see also cluster [i]). An example is the teachers' control of the paperwork. Perhaps more shared ownership of the paperwork, including developing an agenda together, participating in written evaluations and asking parents to also take notes, would increase the equity of what was included in the final document and assist teachers to remember aspects of the discussion that were important to the parents. However, all participants felt the meeting process was flexible and able to be reviewed at any time. This attitude, coupled with the use of the 'summary sheet' (see clusters [a] and [i]) appeared to reduce the pressure at meetings to insist decisions were made, perhaps when parents did not yet have adequate information.

Inclusion / Integration. There were several opportunities for parents to be involved generally in the wider-school and most parents felt their children also had appropriate opportunities to be included. However, several students and teachers felt the options were limited and because parents had limited power to change school systems, a finding echoed by Baker (2002), they were largely obliged to accept the arrangements offered. There was also much variability in quality. Some experiences made the parents and students feel unwelcome and the wider-school teachers expected the teacher aide to take full responsibility while the student was in class. There were also examples of full inclusion where the student participated fully as a member of the class. Successful inclusion appeared to depend on the goodwill, skill and knowledge levels of individual teachers. Relief teachers were mentioned as a group who would potentially benefit from more information about student rights and working with these students. This should include understanding the potential benefits to peers as equal citizens. In agreement with the findings of Hulston (2000), the possibility of stigma and marginalisation resulting from participation in special education was real for these participants. Further, in agreement with a strong literature base (e.g. Booth, 1998; Mitchell, 2000; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000) and presented in several clusters, special education contributed to the barriers between

students and their regular peers and teachers. However, the needs of the students for specialised and adapted support, such as opportunities for the Deaf students to learn about their own culture, opportunities to develop a raft of community and vocational skills and networks, therapy requirements and opportunities to establish basic literacy and numeracy skills needed to be balanced at all times against the students' right to inclusion and the need of others in the community to learn from and about them. Despite the huge literature around the benefits and possibilities of full inclusion (e.g. Lovey, 2002; Quinn & Ryba, 2000; Sailor, 2002; Westwood, 2003), and the problems associated with segregation (Ballard, 1998, 1999) or a dual system (Mitchell, 2000; Moore et al., 1999) all parents and teachers in this study asserted the need for a balance between the two styles of education. As many authors indicate (e.g. Dabkowski, 2004; Pumpian, 1999; Quinn & Ryba) there is a belief in doing it better, but there was no indication from these participants that special education, should or could be abandoned in the present social and political environment of the school.

Some barriers to parents participating more in the student's inclusion processes were identified as (a) the physical isolation of some of the special education centres, (b) the possibility that parents did not view a relationship with wider-school teachers as relevant, preventing them from taking up such opportunities as did exist such as the parent-teacher interviews, and (c) the need to improve the school-wide reporting systems, to ensure all students were included. In a similar vein to that discussed above (see *transparency*) parents need more knowledge of choices and opportunities for inclusion, and more direct contact with those educating their children. Whānau teachers were mentioned as being very influential in the social inclusion of students, and parents sought more diary comments from these teachers. In suggesting whānau teachers chair IEP meetings one parent's ideas coincided with those of Lovey (2002). The outcomes of the meeting would then have the potential to become better understood and more transparent to the wider-school staff. In line with the recommendations of Berger (2000), Epstein et al. (2002), Sailor (2002), and St John et al., (1997), parents also need stronger mechanisms for influencing the development and maintenance of opportunities and a say in the policies which guide them (see clusters [a] and [e]).

Consideration of teacher professional development, improved systems for collaboration and information flow and a review of the roles and responsibilities of all staff (see cluster [h]) would help the school develop the opportunities for *all* members of the school community to benefit from the inclusion of young people with disabilities. Parent-teacher interview participation and satisfaction could well be a significant indicator of successful inclusion.

Transition and Change. Most parents felt the transition process was working well, or had worked well for them, even though it was a relatively new area for some of the staff, and there was always some stress related to change. The practices generally provided collaborative processes between old and new services as recommended by Berger (2000), Buswell (1999) and Hallahan and Kauffman (2000). Effective interrelationships between each microsystem in the students' environment (Figures 3 & 4) were essential for successful transitions. Unless the whole system was working well, students had the potential to "fall through a crack" (Emma, student), and miss out on important opportunities and supports. The process of transition appears in the discussion of most clusters in this analysis; this indicates how important it is for each aspect of the matrix to function effectively in order to achieve a successful transition, including transitions into school, exiting school and between various settings within the school. Parents needed clear information from the school and sound support from community organisations (see cluster [c]), as well as efficient, balanced and flexible school systems that provided the opportunities and supports needed to make choices and/or support their young adults to make positive choices concerning transition.

In accordance with opinions in the literature (e.g. Buswell, 1999; Foreman, 2004; Lipsky, 1989) the transition process was highly individualised and called for both responsive and proactive processes in relation to the changing focus of students and families. However, as discussed earlier, a barrier to flexibly applying these attributes was presented by the IEP, which has a prescribed format. A further conundrum which presented in transition was the dilemma evident in staff providing proactive processes, which were appreciated by parents but which could work to preclude parents from taking an active role in transition (see cluster [e]). The importance of shared understandings and goals, as discussed in cluster [i], was paramount in transition. For students exiting the school system, their vision for the future and ability to represent themselves became more important; Martin et al. (2004) believe this concern emphasises the need to ensure students develop strong participatory skills throughout their high school years. Successful transition also required realistic choices and flexibility of opportunity (e.g. see clusters [a] and [b]).

Aspects of the school climate were particularly critical for new parents. As also reported by McGee et al. (2004), of particular concern to new parents was the ability to express and realise their vision for their child and to come to grips with the new school, its personnel and systems. Success depended heavily on the opportunities available to approach staff and the general climate of the school (e.g. see cluster [a]). In agreement with the findings of Thomas and Graham (2002), it is possible the barriers created by secondary school systems and individuals

within that system limited new parents' ability to fully express their wishes and participate in a schooling system which provided genuine choice (see also clusters [g] and [i]).

The student's role. Several students attended their own IEP meetings and said they had opportunities to contribute as well as to make decisions, most of the time. Joyce (1997) provides support that senior students at least should be involved in their own IEPs. However, they were not particularly involved in planning the meetings or in evaluation or IEP objectives. Further, their participation at the meetings showed considerable variation. However, students generally answered questions and asserted their opinions freely, although they made around half as many assertions as responses. They generally asked very few questions, and engaged in almost none of the informal chat of the adults (see Tables 11 & 12). In agreement with McGahee et al. (2001) students would benefit from not only attending, but also from participating in other aspects of the IEP cycle, such as taking responsibility for achieving IEP objectives and assisting with planning, organisation and evaluation. In concurrence with the findings of Martin et al. (2004) these students appeared to need more support to develop greater skills to facilitate greater participation.

As stated previously, despite the perceived need to 'cut apron strings' and increase students' personal responsibility, students liked their parents to be involved at school, and in agreement with broad literature support (e.g. Berger, 2000; Decker & Decker, 2003; Deslandes et al., 1999; Diffily, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002), most also saw it as integral to their success; student success was a balance between increased opportunities to function independently, and a necessary and desired degree of parental oversight. This balance was not always viewed the same between teachers and parents, and a greater degree of communication on the subject would probably reduce misunderstandings, ensure meetings were comfortable for all, ensure students received the support they needed, and ensure important information was not lost between home and school. The degree of student independence also needed to reflect a level at which the students themselves felt comfortable.

Cluster [e]. Supports and Systems. The special education department provided the system of supports for students with identified special needs and their families. This arrangement resulted in supports which were considered responsive, proactive and accessible, important features of successful home-school partnering as identified by numerous authors (e.g. Decker & Decker, 2003; Friend & Cook, 2003; Rock, 2000). Participants believed teachers were highly responsive to the changing needs of the students and parents almost all the time. Parents also

felt their vision for their child would be influential, an important feature of any home-school partnership according to Deiner (1999) and Turnbull and Turnbull (1996), although findings in clusters [b], [h] and [i] reveal parents were not always able to have adequate input to ensure their aspirations were met. Further, the special education system was outside the mainstream of regular school functioning; the parents and the teachers frequently felt they were outsiders or 'visitors' to the wider-school. In this regard the systems worked to exclude and marginalise the department as a whole and the parents and students individually, a problem posed in the literature, for example by, Dorn (2002), and Paul and Cranston-Gingras (2002).

Accessibility issues related to the staff, choice of subject and the physical spaces in the school. Parents felt there was good access to the classes and programmes they wanted their child to attend, and while there were some frustrations, access was generally negotiated satisfactorily. However, in conflict with the ideals of Quinn and Ryba (2000) and other inclusionists, *negotiated* rather than *automatic* access was a feature of the system. Echoing Ballard (1998, 1999), the teachers believed the problems that did occur relating to access discriminated against the student with disabilities. These problems resulted from (a) limitations in the understandings of wider-school staff, (b) the academic emphasis of subject teachers, (c) parents' limited access to information (see clusters [b], [h] and [i]), or (d) problems with the physical layout of the school. Further, almost all parents worked through the special education staff when accessing the wider-school. Special education staff were highly accessible on a personal level. While there were no clear lines of communication with wider-school staff, and although the special education department did "its best to be part of the school" (Kate, parent & staff), the marginalisation of students and the department itself was seen as contributing to access problems with the wider-school (see cluster [h]). Following the analysis of Dorn (2002), these exclusionary structures created barriers to participation in the wider-school, and although not generally articulated by the participants, limited their effectiveness as partners. While all participants expressed a need for special education support and parent involvement in that support, the dual system of special and regular education models similar to that described by Mitchell (2000) and Moore et al. (1999), created ambiguities and role confusions that had not been resolved. The dual system amounted to a significant paradigm clash, as exemplified by many participants who expressed the potential for inclusion as a balance between the two styles of education (also see clusters [b], [h] and [i]).

Although Decker and Decker (2003) and Rock (2000) assert that accessibility is highly prized by parents of students with disabilities, parents did not have access to on-going information about student progress. This was true of wider-school, special education and polytechnic programmes. However, neither did many parents ask to see student work. Sadler (1989) insists

that feedback is essential for learning to occur. For parents to participate as full partners, it follows that they need to be in a position to reinforce and provide feedback to their children on their educational endeavours. Further, it is clear that parents need regular access to this kind of information if they are to understand and participate in the implementation and evaluation of student objectives as well as decision-making processes. In accordance with a bulk of literature (e.g. Decker & Decker, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Lovey, 2002; Thorburn, 1997) strengthening the parent-teacher meetings or providing a new, more successful forum for sharing information both have potential to ameliorate this issue. Another possible solution could involve greater, more focussed use of the student diaries.

Special education systems were seen as proactive. While most participants considered this to be a positive attribute, there is a danger in staff making decisions and actioning them without parental or wider-school involvement; this can lead to teachers developing 'expert' status, reducing the perceived need for parental or colleague involvement, limiting their efficacy in the partnership and creating an inappropriate dependence (e.g. Baker, 2002; Fraser, 2000; Harry, 1992; Lipsky, 1989).

Wider-school systems were seen as variable, with a tendency not to consider the needs of special education students in advance with regards to planning instruction and school trips. Aligned to the findings of Crockett and Kauffman (1999), teacher development leading to greater teacher self efficacy in the area of special education needs was considered important by several participants. Walther-Thomas et al. (2000), and York-Barr & Kronberg (2002) have concluded that incremental change can be effective, and Westwood (2003) has indicated small steps are the most likely to be the most beneficial approach to change. In a hopeful vein, given the general climate of welcome and goodwill in the school, it is possible that teachers would commit to a programme which established more accessible, proactive and responsive programmes in the wider-school. A regular forum for meeting staff and viewing work was also suggested by many parents (see cluster *[c]*).

Concerns with school size and class size were school management issues aired by some participants. It is possible that these were considered issues for special education staff to negotiate their way around. As anticipated by Mitchell (2000) and Moore et al. (1999) striking a balance between the two styles of education was a dilemma for many participants, underlining the notion that these systems operate largely in isolation from each other. It is possible that greater special education participation in wider school management structures, through staff representation and an increased role for the special education management committee, would

lead to a more representative voice for this section of the school population. While parent representatives were very supportive of the teachers and special centres, they had no particular role other than to receive reports; there was no indication that any action should be taken by them regarding the reports. They had no proactive role in advice or policy development. There was in fact very little evidence of parent voice on the committee.

Following the thinking of Berger (2000), Sailor (2002) and St John et al. (1997), parents need stronger mechanisms for influencing how special education and wider-school opportunities are developed and maintained and a say in the policies which guide them (see policy, cluster [a]). An advisory role for the committee and its active participation in policy development would assist the principal and the BOT to gain a clearer understanding of the aspirations of this group of parents and the needs, rights and wants of their children. The parent representatives could be encouraged to canvass the opinions of their particular constituencies (e.g. parents of Deaf students) on specific issues. This is a forum which is underutilised by parents and which has potential to provide a mechanism for increased parent representation and participation, not only in policy but in the actual development and maintenance of opportunities and supports for all members of the school community.

Cluster [h]. Communication and Systems. The literature is unequivocal about ensuring effective communication systems exist between home and school (e.g. Dabkowski, 2004; Decker & Decker, 2003; Fraser, 2000; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Idol et al., 2000; Quinn & Ryba, 2000). In this study, information flowed readily between home and special education staff most of the time, and parents felt important information from home was disseminated efficiently through this channel. However, contrary to the ideal presented in the literature, but in agreement with the Massey University (2002) findings, around two thirds of parents and all teachers had recent experience of communication problems related to wider-school systems, special education systems or the systems which link special education and the wider-school.

Nichols & Read (2002) contend that how information is communicated can be complex and unpredictable, and while there were several mechanisms in place that gave opportunities for communication between home and school such as diaries, phone calls and other informal 'catch-ups', IEP meetings and parent-teacher meetings, some parents were far less involved than others. Information from school tended to be of a general kind or related to student management needs (e.g. see Table 9). There was little attempt to engage parents in the learning process and parents of less verbally able students, in particular, felt they needed more

information to keep them current with their child's activities at school: what and how they were learning and whether difficulties were being experienced. Further, there was a significant group of students with higher verbal ability who were presumed to be able to convey messages. This was sometimes not the case and important information was either not exchanged or misinformation was provided. Generally only a one-way process operated with the wider school, in the form of newsletters and reports; there was very little direct contact between these teachers and parents. There was also disquiet about timeliness, for example around provision of information for trips, and around provision of IEP evaluations. Further, many students failed to receive school reports in some subjects on a number of occasions.

Epstein and Hollifield (1996) found that parental roles varied and Deslandes et al. (1999) found improvements accrued differently depending on the processes adopted by schools. It would be worthwhile then to investigate ways the school could improve communication systems related to learning outcomes and information flow generally, and specifically with each affected group. For example, Hallahan and Kauffman (2000) concluded that homework is a key aspect of home-school relationships, and while homework provided some of these parents with insights into how the student was doing at school, there appeared to be no particular system to ensure parents were able to assist with homework tasks. Homework could be more widely used as a vehicle to communicate progress on school work and to assist parents to understand and participate in the teaching and learning process. By providing a greater variety of opportunities and increased flexibility in style, as recommended by Gestwicki (2000) for example, parents who are traditionally hard to reach may choose to become involved. Further, a conscious communication of respect for and understanding of the diversity of parental personal and cultural preference, as promoted by Bevan-Brown (2002, 2003), Booth (1998), Fraser (2000), MacFarlane (2000) and Wats and Tutwiler (2003) may increase opportunities for even more parents.

While, participants agreed with Menlove et al. (2001) and Thomson and Rowan (1996) that IEP meetings were valuable opportunities to ensure information flowed, this was impeded by limited attendance (see cluster *[b]*). Special educators then became intermediaries between parents and wider-school teachers and in so doing retained much ownership and control of the process, perhaps limiting the other team members as effective partners. This practice was unlike the more inclusive communication patterns, described by Andrews (1996), Ashman and Elkins (2002), Foreman (2004) and Lovey (2002) and shared vision and goals become very difficult to achieve (see cluster *[i]*). Several parents wanted new opportunities for informing them about progress in class, and for sharing perspectives with teacher aides and wider-school teachers such

as open nights or general 'get togethers', thereby establishing two-way information flow. When all parties talk directly to each other a *collaborative partnership* can germinate. Increased use of communication books and diaries by wider-school subject and whānau teachers, and better understanding of these processes by the teacher aides, could also improve the communication between staff and between school and home in a relatively simple development of existing processes. Similarly, when issues arose, the involvement of families could be sought earlier and more directly through the diary, potentially resulting in improved outcomes for the student.

Lovey (2002) and Pumpian (1999) have concluded that regular educators have an important role to play in secondary education for teenagers with disabilities. There is also an assumption in the IEP literature (e.g. MOE 1998b; Moltzen 2000) that in fact these teachers do play a significant role in planning and overseeing the work of such students on a day to day basis. However, in agreement with the analysis of Hallahan and Kauffman (2000) and Mitchell (2000), this study found the roles and responsibilities of each group of staff, the parents and the students themselves, was far from clear. Instead, many wider-school teachers appeared to presume all matters relating to the students with disabilities were the responsibility of the special education staff. These teachers did not, therefore, appear to take responsibility for reporting to parents, or finding out information from parents. Neither did students or parents habitually go to them if they needed support. This situation has a corollary in the parent-teacher meetings which were undersubscribed by parents and generally considered a waste of time. In some instances it was stated that the IEP superseded the need to attend and meet directly with the teachers (see cluster [b]).

In order to advance better communication systems and greater collaboration, responsibilities need to be clarified and agreed, although these need to remain flexible in order to remain responsive to the particular mix of parental wishes, student needs and teacher preparedness. Following the conclusions of Buswell (1999) and Sax, Fisher and Pumpian (1999), the principal would clearly have a lead role in improving systems for collaboration, sanctioning professional development programmes and allocating resources, as would the BOT in terms of supporting policy. The special education management committee, with strong parent representation, could play an important role in assisting with policy development and advising on processes which would work for them.

Teacher preparedness was a common theme throughout the interviews and the literature suggests serious limitations in the training provided to regular teachers regarding special teaching and learning needs (e.g. Dabkowski, 2004; Decker & Decker, 2003; Diffily, 2003;

Epstein et al., 2002; Martin, 2004; Pumpian, 1999; Rock, 2000; Thomson & Rowan, 1996). Special education staff sought opportunities to work more closely with their wider-school colleagues, to share their skills, knowledge and ownership of the students. Any move to establish guidelines and increase expectations on staff would need to be accompanied by managed professional development and support. Again a lead role for the principal is indicated in the literature by Buswell (1999), Decker and Decker, and Quinn and Ryba (2000).

5.4.3 Relationships

Strong relationships underpinned all successful aspects of the home-school ecology and were seen by parents and teachers as the most critical aspect of the IEP and general school processes.

Figure 17 represents the *relationships* column of the research matrix (Fig. 5), employed to analyse those interpersonal aspects of the participants' experiences to be discussed in this section.

[c]. Opportunities and Relationships. Networks relating to each student grew idiosyncratically and opportunities to strengthen relationships presented in a variety of ways depending on a range of interconnecting factors such as student interests or cultural affiliations. Bronfenbrenner (as cited in Sontag, 1996; see also Figs. 3 & 4) and many others have shown that an understanding of the student's family system is essential for the success of any collaborative

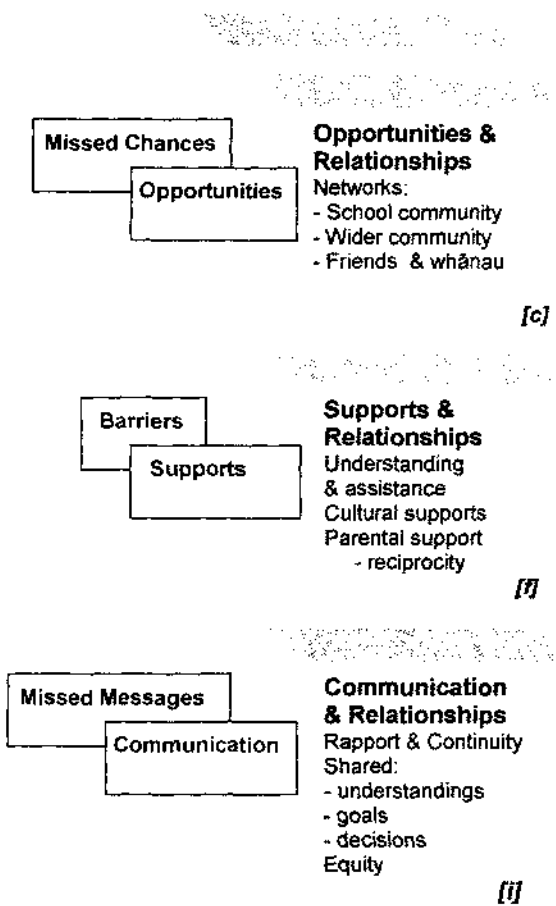


Fig. 17 Sphere of influence: Relationships

endeavour between home and school (e.g. Decker & Decker, 2002; Fraser, 2000; Macfarlane, 2000; Robinson, 2004; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2002). Opportunity for teachers to meet members of the student's wider network are therefore invaluable for increasing the knowledge they have about the way different families live and respond to a person with a disability within their system. Networking was the most common process used by parents to develop and maintain

relationships, however, there were many opportunities to build relationships, which were not well subscribed:

- Wider-school teachers seldom attended IEP meetings.
- Few parents attended parent-teacher meetings or attached any significance to the pastoral or academic systems of the wider-school, which they largely by-passed.
- It could be difficult to liaise with community groups to organise their attendance at meetings, and these groups had their own culture, expectations and resourcing restrictions which were not always compatible with the aims of parents and teachers.
- Parents were sometimes unsure about which community groups would be appropriate to attend meetings.
- In some cases teachers were concerned that parents relied heavily on the teachers to maintain connections and did not take up opportunities to extend their networks.

The circulation of knowledge about children's problems at school is a complex networking process which can occur in unpredictable ways (Nichols & Read, 2002) and the IEP meeting itself may act as a barrier to direct contact with wider-school teachers (also see Inclusion, cluster [b] and [g]). Further, as Marlene (parent) said, "It is not a perfect world and the IEP only covers what those of us present think to bring to it". In concurrence with Evans et al. (1999) and Quinn and Ryba (2000), who believe strong networks enable effective collaboration between home, school and the community, parents frequently wanted more opportunities to meet outside of formal IEP meetings with personnel working with their child. Peters (2003) also concluded that alternative or additional processes to the formal IEP meeting would assist parents to build stronger relationships and would place them in a more equitable position to make decisions and to follow-up possibilities for their child. Providing a range of opportunities involving differing formats would improve the chances of making successful connections. There could be many advantages to developing more family orientated events (Coil, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Salend, 1998). This may be particularly true for Māori families, who may prefer more whānau centred activities (Macfarlane, 2000). The issues bulleted in the preceding paragraph could also be partially addressed through these less formal opportunities.

In particular, some kind of semi-formal event held on a regular basis, perhaps with a different emphasis each time, could offer opportunities to cover many of the perceived gaps in parents' understanding and knowledge, as well as provide a forum to meet with different groups such as staff, community groups and each other and strengthen communication systems. For example, information regarding transition provided at a parent event could help those families just entering, or feeling anxious about transition phases. Presenting information on IEP format and

student resourcing could demystify these processes for new parents and others. Meeting with community groups outside the formal IEP meeting could reduce perceived problems with differing roles, responsibilities and expectations. Family-friendly events such as barbeques were recommended by some participants. The opportunity to discuss issues with other parents would strengthen these events. A role for a stronger special education management committee (see cluster [b]) could be in ensuring parent participation in the decision-making regarding any initiative.

The one major opportunity to develop relationships with wider school teachers, the parent-teacher interview, was rejected by most parents. Non attendance at these interviews was part of a more pervasive picture of parental disconnection from the wider-school. Consideration also needs to be given to why most of the parents did not attend parent-teacher interviews, as this is a major opportunity already available in the school, where parents should be able to gain more information about their child's progress and also assist teachers to develop better understandings (see clusters [b] and [h]). The informal networking processes cannot completely replace these more formal information sharing opportunities.

[f]. Supports and relationships. Parents received support from staff and reciprocated in a raft of ways. The students also reported they turned to their parents and special education staff for support regarding school matters. However, most parents said they would participate more were they asked. One barrier to parental participation was the dilemma created by the perceived need to encourage student independence (see also cluster [b]). In addition, parents of students who are not particularly successful may be more inclined to disengage from school activities (Deslandes et al., 1999). However, as discussed elsewhere, overwhelming research shows that students do better if families are involved (e.g. Berger, 2000; Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Decker & Decker, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002; Robinson, 2004). Further, this group of high school students are among those that could benefit the most from parental involvement (Decker & Decker, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Taylor, 2000). These factors need a heavy weighting when considering the balance between parental involvement and student independence, and point to a need to encourage greater parental participation, with more targeted and specific support. For example, it is difficult to imagine how parents could support students with their homework or many of their IEP objectives when there are so few examples of parents and teachers actually discussing the nature of the work involved, the student's progress, or specific strategies for achieving the goals (see also clusters [b] & [h]).

Parents appreciated those occasions when support with schoolwork, homework, co-curricular activities or personal needs was provided by wider-school teachers, sports coaches and the pastoral network. To them it signified that the students *could* be included as part of the regular school processes. It is clear then that the importance of relationships with a wider range of personnel should not be underestimated when striking the balance between special education and wider-school provisions for both parents and students. In support of this notion, Lovey (2002) shows how regular high school teachers can effectively manage many aspects of programmes for these students, including IEPs. However, special education processes appeared to contribute barriers to reciprocal supportive relationships between wider-school teachers and parents. Two such barriers relate to 'expert status' and 'ownership'. Acting as academic intermediaries and fulfilling major pastoral duties are considered by the teachers to be important aspects of their role. These activities, which according to the parents are performed with considerable expertise, may leave little room for others to undertake responsibilities (Martin et al., 2004) and may need to be reconsidered, if parents and wider-school teachers are to come closer together.

The success of collaborative partnerships, has been shown to require effective communication and strong collaboration and congruence among educators, parents and families (Buswell, 1999; Jorgensen, 1999; Salend, 1998; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). However, as asserted by Mitchell (2000) and Moore et al. (1999), the 'ownership' of students within one model (special) could be interpreted as contributing to ambiguities counterproductive to participation within another (inclusive) because many wider-school teachers do not appear to have an expectation of catering for these students. Conversely, the students and parents may not feel they *belong* in the wider-school creating difficulties in forming meaningful relationships (see also clusters [b] and [h]).

The informal nature of the relationship networks appeared to mean these worked well for those people with well developed networks, the confidence to seek support when needed and the knowledge of where to turn. In addition, whether or not students or parents received the support they needed depended on the goodwill of individual teachers, which left a good deal to chance. More defined, open and transparent lines of communication with an increase in direct contact with the staff who worked with their children was requested by many parents. The literature is emphatic that this is not an unreasonable request (Buswell, 1999; Jorgensen, 1999; Salend, 1998; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). However, as concluded by Buswell (1999) and Sax, Fisher and Pumpian (1999), much is in the hands of the principal to advocate for the marginalised

group and establish supports which promote school-wide inclusiveness and collaborative consultation as described by Thousand et al. (1995).

While key teachers attracted a great deal of praise for the support they gave in most areas, there was a need for more support of parents in planning, evaluation and implementation of IEPs (see clusters [b] and [h]), and more support of new parents (see clusters [b], [c] and [i]). An example of the first concern was that parents and teachers seldom collaborated on the achievement of IEP objectives. In regards to the second concern, new parents struggled to learn many aspects of the school culture and systems. For example, they had a limited notion of how IEPs worked at the school. As Scott (teacher) pointed out,

We have taken years to get our heads around it, and these parents never get any [professional development] on it. All they get is the actual IEP meeting.

The work of Epstein et al. (2002) suggests that better results could accrue if teachers fostered greater collaboration with parents in targeted areas. Other supporting evidence comes from Decker and Decker (2003), Diffily (2003), Hallahan and Kauffman (2000), Lovey (2002) and Thorburn (1997).

The specific cultural supports provided by the school for Deaf and Māori students and their families were considered important, although two Māori families believed more support was required for students who were both Māori and living with a disability. The work of individual teachers in maintaining strong relationships with the Māori students was seen by both parents and teachers as a significant strength of the school's support network. The 'family' discussion and consensus style of decision-making at IEP meetings and other times was reported by some Māori families as matching their preferred style. However, with greater flexibility more progress could probably be made towards accommodating cultural preferences as promoted by Bevan-Brown (2002, 2003), MacFarlane (2000) and Wilkie (2001). Discourses which marginalise groups in our schools can be changed (Neilson, 2000). An example of such change was the slow, but eventually successful, move from the exclusion of Deaf students from regular classrooms to their full inclusion, and the adoption of NZSL as an official language in this country. It is possible other groups can have the same success as Deaf students through gradually adopting beneficial change.

[i] Communication and Relationships. The prevailing perception was that strong, communicative relationships founded on good rapport between special education staff and parents provided the basis for their effective, harmonious IEP partnerships. According to all adult participants these features were paramount. Teachers' practices were generally in accordance with those recommended in the literature (Decker & Decker, 2003; Diffily, 2003; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2000; Lovey, 2002; Thorburn, 1997) and in accordance with parents' wishes. As could be anticipated from the conclusions of Rock (2000), teachers' positive personal attributes such as flexibility, openness and warmth were highly significant to parents. Relationships took time to evolve and a key factor in maintaining rapport was the continuity offered by a stable workforce. Trust could be built up and most parents reported liking having one person, the key teacher, maintaining oversight of individual students.

All teachers and almost all parents believed that they focussed on common goals and usually shared equally in deliberations, reaching consensus decisions. Teachers attempted to act as facilitators and co-ordinators in meetings and to communicate effectively, in clearly understandable ways, throughout the year. Most parents and students believed their opinions were valued, and some parents were even concerned they held a greater share of the power. Despite these strengths in communication, several potential problems were indicated: (a) Parents were not always in possession of critical information; (b) teachers retained considerable control over the IEP process; (c) prevailing discourses and practices contributed to a degree of *marginalisation* or *assimilation* of students with disabilities and their parents, and the special education processes; (d) a few parents and students felt they were not equal in decision-making; and (e) wider-school teachers were hardly involved at all (see also cluster *[b]*).

Although parents generally felt they understood everything that was discussed and could raise any matter they wished, teachers acknowledged they had considerably more knowledge and control in certain areas and Jenny felt she was sometimes expected to 'be the fountain of knowledge' even though she knew this was unrealistic. Further, and in agreement with Massey University (2002) this study found many parents needed more information from the school in order to understand issues, participate fully and to make decisions.

Significant decisions were sometimes made, such as making a change of subject for a student, without the knowledge or participation of the parent. Although the parents were content that teachers were working in their best interests, they were obliged to trust the processes, because they had not been involved or consulted. Frequently their actions appeared to amount to little more than rubber stamping the teachers' work. Their experience resonates with the literature

which also suggests that parents continue to get limited decision-making opportunities in schools (Altemueller, 2001; Bird, 1998, cited in Baker, 2002; Garriott, Pruitt, Wandry & Snyder, 2000; Oleniczak, 2002; Peters, 2003).

Other power issues arose within meetings and related to the prevailing influence of the teacher's style, the teacher chairing all the meetings, the meetings all being held at school and the teachers' control of the agenda and paperwork (see cluster [b]). Despite several parents reporting that they would like to know more and be involved more, they seldom challenged or questioned why teachers wanted to take a particular path, or the recommendations of the teachers. Many asked very few questions at meetings; there appeared to be a tacit agreement that this was the way it would be.

It is possible that by not sharing in key aspects of the IEP process, parents were then unable to share equally in the rest of the process; they could not 'bring to the meeting' an informed perspective capable of presenting alternatives or fully engaging in decision-making. Conversely, through greater access to 'work in progress' and increased involvement in the various steps of the IEP process, parents would be in a better position to make informed decisions. One strategy to equalise power positions at meetings which worked in the opinion of the teachers, was the use of a summary sheet. This could document decisions 'in progress' enabling participants more time to gather information or to consider possibilities. Parents, however, did not necessarily understand the purpose of these documents. Again parents need more information to be able to access the school processes equitably.

Another explanation, resonating with the conclusions of Fraser (2000) and Martin et al. (2004) for example', is that parents and wider-school teachers could possibly defer to special education teachers because of their perceived 'expert' knowledge and propriety over the students. The possibility that these perceptions exist needs to be examined. Parents need to gain the confidence, knowledge and skills to see themselves more as 'co-producers' of the student's education (Berger, 2000). If parents and wider-school teachers were encouraged to develop a perception of greater self-efficacy and equality they might feel empowered to take on more active participation and responsibility. With greater knowledge of wider-school subject matter, perhaps through homework processes, parents may feel more empowered about participation and decision-making in these areas as well; Epstein et al. (2002) would concur with this analysis.

Although integration and inclusion were valued, from many perspectives schooling for these students fitted a segregated model (see cluster [b]) where special education staff, students and parents “sit on the boundaries” (Kate, parent & staff), or merely ‘visit’ (Cathryn, parent & staff) the school. Further, as parents gradually get to know the school’s “way of doing things” (Erma, parent) they may be merely assimilated into its dominant culture, thus losing their voice (Fraser, 2000; Harry, 1992) and perpetuating the forces of marginalisation (David, 2004; Paul, French et al., 2002).

A theme which links with assimilation and which frequently appears in the literature (e.g. Berry & Auhl, 2001; Cherryholmes, 1988; David, 2004; Fraser, 2000; Harry, 1992; Moltzen, 2000; Neilson, 2000; Peters, 2003; Stangvik, 1998; Thomson & Rowan, 1996; Thousand et al., 1995) is that traditional power imbalances in schools constrain parents from ‘rocking the boat’ (Abby, parent), expressing their aspirations and/or acting on them. In most of the situations discussed in this study, parents were shown to be in a weaker position, with the potential for their voice to be sublimated by those of the more powerful ‘partners’. Further, exclusionary models of practice (Dorn, 2002; Paul & Cranston-Gingras, 2002) serve to reinforce power imbalances between parents and teachers. In this case special education could be viewed as a system which controls rather than empowers parents, firstly, by limiting their access to wider-school decision-making processes, and secondly, by maintaining control over the IEP process, and accepting ‘expert’ status (see cluster [e]). As demonstrated by Peters, parents cannot participate equitably in the IEP partnership because social expectations act to control and disempower them as already disadvantaged participants.

Partnership is an evocative term used in both the Learning Support policy and the Special Education policy of Midland High (see Appendix A for school policies). However, the limited equity and lack of collaboration in some practices not only calls into question, but reinforces the danger of paying lip-service to the concept of partnership in school documents (Fraser, 2000). This is a problem also signalled by Franklin et al. (2004), Harry (1992) and Friend and Cook (2003), reminding us that equitable, collaborative qualities do not necessarily exist simply because the term *partnership* has been invoked.

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

At Midland High School all parents of ORRS funded students were satisfied almost all of the time. A school climate which was mostly positive and strong relationships with special education staff were identified as major strengths. Perhaps the high levels of satisfaction were due in part to the mitigating effects of special education processes, which were seen to make the most of the possibilities, albeit within a limited range of opportunities. Conversely, these processes also clouded inequities and limited parental participation. Broader influences such as MOE mandates, government ideology and socially constructed attitudes and discourses within the school and wider community, also served to reinforce these imbalances. In a similar result to that reported by Avramidis et al. (2002) the school displayed a strong culture of goodwill and humanity which led to the successful integration of most of the students. It also provided a 'place' for their parents. However the understandings and expectations generated by the dominant forces in the school were unable to accommodate their unquestioned inclusion. It is important, then, to maintain those aspects of the process that parents most appreciated and which enhanced prospects for students, while attempting to lift outcomes in those areas where parents were unhappy and also where analysis revealed structures worked against their interests.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to identify important features of home-school relationships with the families of special education students at Midland High School. The project was driven by a desire to generate positive action to improve both partnerships with families/ whānau and learning outcomes for students with disabilities. The purpose has been achieved by examining participants' perspectives alongside the literature of the domain and providing a discussion that leads to a series of practical recommendations. The literature review identified *collaborative partnerships* as representing an amalgamation of positive practice in this domain, and the main findings have been evaluated as they compare to the principles of this type of partnership.

The challenge presented in this chapter is to celebrate and maintain the strong base of goodwill and positive practice which has been identified, while strengthening those processes with the potential for development. The approach proposed in this thesis was to evaluate the impact of each of the three identified spheres of influence within the school environment that affect these relationships. School is part of the parents' exosystem (see Fig. 3); unlike students and teachers, they are unfamiliar with many day-to-day aspects of the system. It is therefore incumbent on the school to provide the best possible opportunities, supports and channels of communication to ensure parents are equipped to participate fully and equally.

The students were adamant that parental involvement was both worthwhile and necessary. These teenagers also liked and benefited from their parents' involvement, despite a perceived need amongst the adults to 'cut apron strings'. Further, many parents wanted to be more involved, and it follows that both groups would benefit from improved home-school relationships. In this chapter opportunities to make incremental steps towards improved relationships have been identified.

The parents in this study have engaged in a 'partnership' with their school, which has been described in terms of neo-liberal 'parental choice' politics. They have 'chosen' a school and accepted ORRS funding which means they are also obliged to attend meetings, maintain regular contact and support agreed plans. The parents have significant and direct influence on resource allocation, so long as they comply with the various mechanisms which serve to control this and

other decision-making processes. While the school in this study was very welcoming and provided a range of well organised services considered essential to the needs of the students, special education provisions could also be viewed as a gate-keeping structure, ensuring these students remain 'in a bubble' at the margins of school activity. The move towards collaborative partnerships with parents needs to be viewed in this broader socio-political environment, which also incorporates a host of other cultural, political, economic and social influences, ever-changing in the life cycle of the family (see Fig. 4).

6.2 EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH

6.2.1 Delimitations and Limitations

The inquiry is limited to an examination of parental relationships and partnerships; it does not investigate all aspects or perspectives within the IEP process. The study did not attempt to develop an understanding of the perspectives of the principal, wider-school teachers, teacher aides or the students' peers. To provide a complete picture of how the relationships are interconnected within and between each sphere of influence, further information would need to be gathered from these and other members of the school community.

Non-participants. It is difficult to know how the non-participant families view the school. As some of the findings relate to this group, a stronger study would have resulted from increased participation by these very parents. It is the researcher's opinion that a personal approach would have increased the participation rate of the parents'. However, bearing in mind my position in the school, this could have been construed as coercion, so it was determined to use a mailed invitation and a third party to contact parents.

Restricted participation. As discussed elsewhere, my involvement in the setting could be seen to have limiting effects, if the participants were not comfortable to criticise my practices. Conversely, participants may have felt more comfortable discussing issues with me because of the relationships we have developed over time and because there was clear potential for improvement.

Culture and diversity. Greater insight could have been gained through analysis of the cultural perspectives of the participants. However, this study has not sought to define participants on the basis of culture or ethnicity. For this reason, it was decided to avoid making statements based on cultural understandings except where these were identified by the parents themselves or were

raised as an integral part of discussion in the literature. Some comments have nevertheless been included in the previous chapters. These insights would benefit from further investigation.

Methodology. A number of limitations to the methodology of this study are acknowledged:

1. The study involves a relatively small number of participants from one secondary school special education department. External validity and reliability cannot be established. The research is not replicable and generalisations need to be made with caution. Stake (2000) says, however, that an intrinsic case study need not avoid generalisation or conclusions, but must include adequate 'thick description' for the reader to understand the case and to form their own opinion. In this study, the breadth of data gathered using a variety of methods ensures the case description is 'thick', allowing a substantial depth of analysis and data triangulation.

Although a stronger study would have resulted from larger numbers of participants and more schools, within a post-modern context, where symbolic interactionism is a prominent underpinning theory, the aim is not to search for universal truths, but to engage in understanding specifics related to time, place and personal meaning. Further, the time available to complete the study influenced the size of the sample.

2. As observations are limited by the number of parameters a researcher can observe at any one time, the observation process could have been strengthened through video or audio recording. This would have allowed the collection of information on the type and frequency of teacher and other team member contributions, and other observable parameters. A comparison between the contributions of the various team members could then be made. However, it was felt this would be unnecessarily complex, time-consuming and intrusive.

3. It is recognised that semi-structured interviews and observations produce non-standard responses (Denscombe, 2003), making analysis highly subjective. Further, researcher bias is a limitation as all information has been 'filtered' through my eyes. This limitation has been reduced as much as possible through critical reflection, checking for accuracy of interpretation as interviews proceeded, participant review of transcripts, on-going iterating reference to the literature, supervisor review and triangulation of data. A converse limitation is that I am normally a key practitioner in this situation and my opinions have been eliminated to a large extent from the report through the processes discussed above, possibly weakening the case.

Future research. Possibilities for research include strengthening the case by investigating it from a wider-school perspective and varying the design to include more and varied school types, including non-fundholder schools. The component clusters of the matrix model itself could also be investigated to determine the appropriateness of the model across a broader range of participants and settings. Examination of the case from the cultural perspective of the participants could also lead to important developments in understanding and practice.

6.2.2 Contributions of the Study

Research design framework. The major outcome of the study has been to provide a fresh model which others can use to view their own circumstances. The focus questions for this study were complex and the data multifaceted, calling for a multi-dimensional model which could marshal and present such data in an appealing action orientated manner. The resultant model utilises appropriate methodology and design to meet these demands and sits within a sound theoretical framework so others can determine the relevance to themselves and their own contexts. The study makes a contribution to both the theory and practice of special education because it explores the convergence of paradigms and because it could be adopted as a starting point for a collaborative process, leading to improvements in each of the clusters described, within Midland High School and other similar schools.

Findings of the Eclectic, Action-Driven Model. The processes this study has attempted to identify and evaluate are analysed within an eclectic, action-driven model (Fig. 1). Further, discussions and recommendations have been developed within an ecological systems context (see Figs. 3 & 4), encompassing understandings perceived as residing with individual parents and students, or within social constructs. The interactions of the participants and the meanings they each attach to those interactions underpin the findings, inform the discussion and guide the recommendations, while directly observable and measurable data are also used to reinforce the analysis. Finally, this model acknowledges a broader social and political front and encompasses a call to action, which aspires to equitable, collaborative and locally agreed outcomes.

According to the post-modernists, knowledge and how we deal with it results from where each of us is situated in time and place, and recommendations cannot be viewed as simple universal prescriptions. The recommendations which follow then are at best, provisional constructs. They are offered as an opportunity for practitioners to enhance their critical, reflective approach to practice regarding parents and students, and perhaps accept some of the challenges which are offered. In the patchwork of ideas, those that work for some will fail or be of no interest to

others. They may be appropriate some of the time and not at others. The positive findings of the study can be viewed as fanning the happy winds of change (see Fig.4) carrying improved relationships, stronger systems and a more pervasive positive climate within in a growing discourse of student and parent rights.

6.3 THE RELATIONSHIP MATRIX: SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

In this concluding chapter the matrix will be viewed as it links ideas in the vertical dimension, because each of the conclusions pertains to a potential practical application within one of the three spheres of influence. Each of these spheres has the potential to be acted on as an entity, although deeper analysis of each cluster and each sub-theme is also possible. The recommendations which follow are formatted to highlight strong points as well as weaknesses in an effort to ensure the many positive features are not lost when changes are made.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.4.1 Climate

The school environment was highly regarded for providing a positive climate for these students and their families. There were many attributes described that participants valued and wished to preserve. These are listed below as recommendations along with those aspects of the climate that were identified as potentially benefiting from further investigation or development.

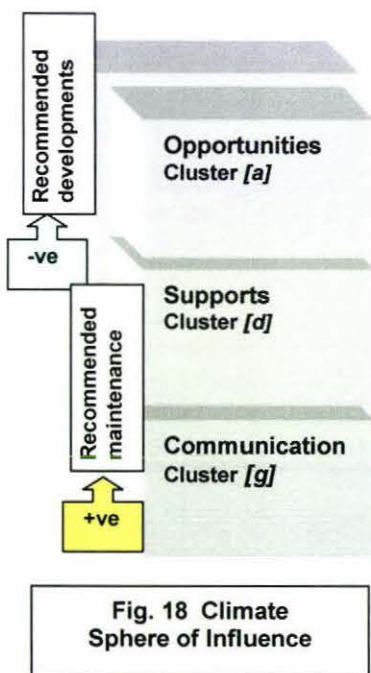


Figure 18 represents the 'climate' sphere of influence from the research matrix (Fig.5).

Recommendations regarding climate.

1. Maintain the flexibility and approachability appreciated by parents, especially with regard to the principal, senior staff, special education staff and individual wider-school teachers, along with those supportive verbal and non-verbal actions which ensured that parents, friends and

whānau were warmly welcomed, accepted and celebrated, and that they felt comfortable to productively discuss their child's needs.

2a. Maintain relaxed and open dealings with parents and whānau, as this practice promoted high levels of trust and goodwill. It is important for teachers to consider carefully the messages they send by all their various actions, not just the words they speak, and benchmark their actions to the assurances of partnership afforded by the school policy. Also,

2b. investigate and remove barriers to open dialogue, including parents' ability to challenge teachers' decisions. Three possible problems were identified. Firstly, parents needed more information to facilitate informed decisions and challenges. Secondly, strong goodwill and loyalty may have prevented parents from 'making a fuss'. Thirdly, non-verbal acts, such as meeting at inappropriate venues, may deter parents from discussing some matters.

2c. Include parents of students with disabilities in policy development through the special education management committee, ensuring rights are acknowledged and responsibilities clearly stated. Several policies were identified as being in need of development.

3a. Analyse with parents the strong sense of serendipity among participants. Improved ability to analyse positive and act on negative experiences would assist parents to gain understandings leading to informed and conscious control over educational decisions for their children. Also,

3b. investigate and correct climatic barriers that put wider-school teachers 'off limits' to special education parents. Ensure the diverse range of parents who belong in the school community feel genuinely welcome in all areas of the school. Several possible barriers appear likely to affect different people at different times:

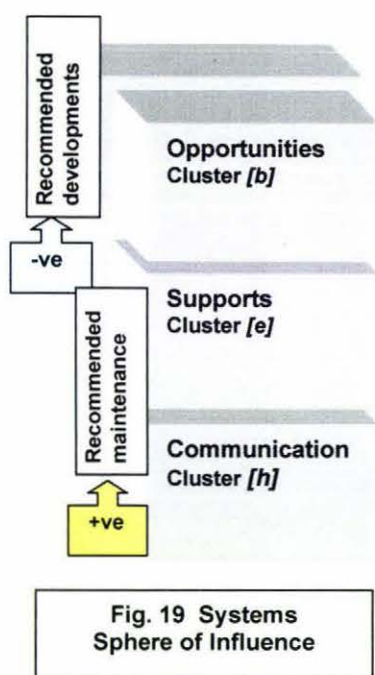
- special education staff may exude a sense of ownership and expertise that creates dependency and passivity in wider-school teachers and parents, limiting their participation;
- wider-school teachers may put up personal barriers because they are not comfortable dealing with the needs of these students for various reasons;
- parents may have assimilated the notion the school is doing the best it can under difficult circumstances and therefore not 'make a fuss';
- the dominant discourse may be based on a deficit model of difference and exclusion; and/or
- it may be more convenient for parents to deal with one specific contact in the school.

4. Consider ways the principal could promote a fully welcoming school climate, ensuring that opportunities actually support parents' needs and are communicated in such a way that they

could plausibly be taken up by the wide diversity of parents in the school community. Some of the suggestions which arose during the study involved,

- initiating on-going professional development for teachers and relief teachers to promote increased understanding and confidence in managing diversity;
- allocating resources, such as time to meet, to encourage collaboration amongst staff;
- continuing to advocate for the rights of this sector of the school community both within the school and in wider forums.

6.4.2 School Systems



Opportunities presented through MOE prescribed systems such as fundholding, school systems such as special education, which supported them, and the various processes associated with communication between groups were predominantly successful. Aspects of the systems which were identified as missed chances, barriers or missed messages appear in this section as recommendations for further investigation or development, along with an exhortation to maintain the many impressive positive aspects of most processes.

Figure 19 represents the *systems* sphere of influence from the research matrix (Fig. 5). It shows those educational systems affecting home-school relationships to be discussed in this section.

Recommendation regarding systems.

1a. Maintain the highly successful system of fundholding for ORRS students. Especially retain those aspects which make the arrangement directly accountable, flexible, transparent, efficient, responsive to the changing needs of the students, more conducive to good trusting relationships with parents than other systems and less complicated for all concerned. Also,

1b. investigate political and procedural aspects of the fundholding system which reduce opportunities for parents, teachers and students and continue to apprise key politicians and MOE officials of the school community's experiences. Within the school there is a need to provide more information to parents on how resources are allocated, thus assisting parents to consider and propose alternatives.

2a. Maintain those highly valued aspects of the IEP process which continue to succeed as needs change throughout the high school years, attempting to ensure that no one style or approach works to exclude valuable alternatives. Moreover, maintain and develop supports that enable students to participate actively in their IEPs, strengthening planning, implementation and self-evaluation in ways that acknowledge their increasing independence from parents and teachers. Significantly, this involves strong parental participation and support. Also,

2b. investigate flexible ways to reframe those political, structural and regulatory aspects of IEPs which are currently less than transparent and found to be limiting the provision of genuine opportunities and supports or effective communication systems. This would involve reviewing what is actually working for families, making changes within individual teams and the special education department as well as investing political energy both within and outside the school community to change what is not;

2c. develop more proactive and inclusive processes that ensure parents and students have greater opportunity for involvement in IEP planning, implementation, evaluation, documentation and reporting. Improvements were also needed in school reports, parent-teacher meetings and in the on-going provision of information about student progress. This would involve open discussion within each team, and in more general forums. Roles and responsibilities need to be transparent and balanced depending on the differing needs of each member, and democratically decided. No tacitly held beliefs should continue to limit participation;

2d. investigate ways to improve communication channels between parents and *all* staff and between the various groups of staff members. Changes should result in increased understanding and a greater uptake in participation in key opportunities such as the IEP meeting and parent-teacher interviews. Improved participation in on-going processes such as more focussed use of diaries and communication books should also occur. An engaging format to encourage parents to reciprocate the teacher's comments in diaries could be devised.

3a. Maintain all the varied and critically important opportunities and supports which resulted in examples of unconstrained inclusion of students and parents in the life of the school. Also,

3b. investigate ways to include parental perspectives more by,

- consulting with parents regarding school systems and communication processes that could result in improved opportunities for inclusion;

- developing the understandings of wider-school staff regarding their children and their aspirations. A reciprocal increase in special education and parental understanding of wider-school subjects and processes would also be beneficial;
- reducing the negative effects of stigma and marginalisation which can result from participation in special education programmes, while ensuring each student receives the support necessary to succeed in the wider-school environment.

4a. Maintain those collaborative practices which provided effective links between old and new services and between each microsystem in the students' environment as their focus changes (a) from school and home centred processes to a more community perspective, (b) to a new school with its unfamiliar personnel and systems, or (c) to a new area within the school. Moreover, maintain those responsive and proactive practices which endeavoured to ensure parents and students had sufficient knowledge and skill to maximise the opportunities. Also,

4b. investigate ways to develop increased family and student effectiveness in choosing, developing and maintaining supports that will see them through the late adolescence and adulthood of the young person concerned. For students exiting the school system, their vision for the future and ability to represent themselves becomes increasingly important;

4c. investigate ways new parents can quickly become effective partners in the new school without merely assimilating their vision for the future of their child. Aspects of school climate, systems and relationships are all critical in the process of entering a new school community;

4d. establish transparent but flexible transition guidelines. Such guidelines could be readily explained to parents and students, reducing some of the anxiety and uncertainty around each transition scenario.

5a. Maintain the many aspects of the special education system which were proactive, accessible, responsive to the changing needs of the students, and which endeavoured to ensure parents' aspirations were met. Also,

5b. investigate ways to resolve the dilemmas created by the existence of dual education provisions within the school, eliminating the 'outsider' experiences of many staff and parents, while maintaining the important supports and services mentioned above. Straightforward ways to access all buildings, all appropriate programmes and all staff are needed; acceptance and inclusion of all students needs to be automatic and not conditional or negotiated. Further, special education systems need to remain proactive while still leaving room for parents and wider-school teachers to be involved;

5c. investigate ways that regular class programmes could be adapted to accommodate the learning styles and needs of all students both within the classroom and during outings, with a parallel provision of professional development, and increased opportunities for staff collaboration.

6a. Maintain the positive and affirming aspects of the special education management committee. Also,

6b. investigate ways to increase the activity of the committee and develop the role of the parent representatives, with the objective of providing a strong mechanism for parents to influence how special education and wider-school opportunities are developed and maintained and have a say in the policies which guide them;

6c. investigate the possibility of increased special education staff participation in the mainstream management structures of the school, leading to better representation for this section of the school population.

7a. Maintain and celebrate the excellent systems which ensured information essential to the education and safety of young people with communication difficulties flowed freely between home and special education staff. Also,

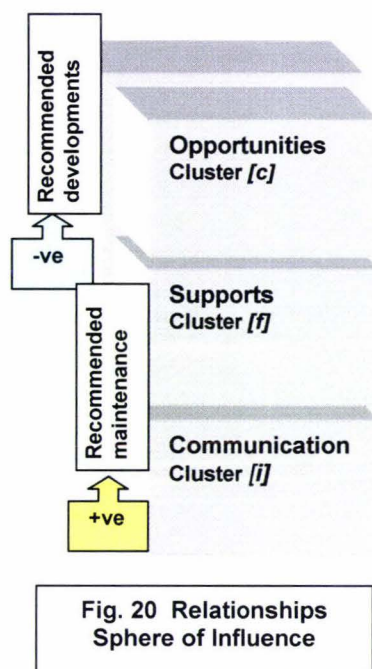
7b. investigate innovative, culturally responsive ways to focus the information from school to engage more parents in the learning process, provide richer detail for parents and ensure maximum independence for students while safeguarding important information;

7c. investigate ways to engage parents in two-way communication with wider-school teachers, reducing the perceived need for an intermediary. Asking wider-school teachers to comment in student diaries would be a straightforward approach. Developing homework programmes that include support for and feedback from parents would create another valuable communication tool. Attention is also required to the one-way process of reports to ensure all students receive these and that they are of a high quality;

7d. engage in collaborative processes designed to clarify the roles and responsibilities of teaching and pastoral support personnel. Such processes would be strengthened by the involvement of parents. The principal, the BOT and the special education management committee could play significant roles ensuring these processes (a) are scheduled to occur, (b) produce outcomes which are supported by sound policy, and (c) are advantageous to the families concerned;

7e. scope the need for staff development and provide this in ways that are mutually beneficial, resulting in improved outcomes for students and families and enhanced collegiality amongst staff.

6.4.3 Relationships



Collaborative partnerships require opportunities to develop relationships between partnership members. However, opportunities are unlikely to be taken up without addressing various barriers. Supports are therefore required to ensure opportunities are accessed. The success of these endeavours depends on individuals' ability to communicate effectively and equally at an interpersonal level.

Figure 20 represents the *relationships* sphere of influence of the research matrix (Fig. 5). Recommendations relating to relationships and the positive and negative dimensions of each of the three major themes are presented in this section.

Recommendations regarding relationships.

- 1a. Maintain the wide diversity of networks providing opportunities to initiate or strengthen beneficial connections within and amongst the various relevant microsystems. Also,
 - increased staff and community attendance at IEP meetings;
 - increased attendance at parent-teacher interviews;
 - increased use of wider-school systems such as deans and whānau teachers;
 - increased use of diaries and other innovative means for direct communication between wider-school staff and home;
 - increased opportunities to learn about and interact with various community groups;
 - increased opportunities for parents to develop self-efficacy in this area and reduce dependence on school to maintain relationships;
 - investigation of innovative family-friendly, culturally appropriate events which could become a forum for networking and information sharing.
- 1b. investigate ways to expand networking opportunities and mutual supports through
 - increased staff and community attendance at IEP meetings;
 - increased attendance at parent-teacher interviews;
 - increased use of wider-school systems such as deans and whānau teachers;
 - increased use of diaries and other innovative means for direct communication between wider-school staff and home;
 - increased opportunities to learn about and interact with various community groups;
 - increased opportunities for parents to develop self-efficacy in this area and reduce dependence on school to maintain relationships;
 - investigation of innovative family-friendly, culturally appropriate events which could become a forum for networking and information sharing.

2a. Continue to be appreciative and reinforce all reciprocal supports provided by parents. Encourage all offers of support in the knowledge that the students like their parents to be involved and that parent involvement is beneficial to all parties. Also,

2b. investigate ways to encourage parent participation, acknowledging that many parents want to be more involved, without placing onus or additional obligations on parents who do not wish to extend their participation, and without diminishing students' steps towards independence. Targeting opportunities and providing supports in specific ways depending on the wishes or cultural preferences and styles of parents and students, individually or in more public forums, could prevent unnecessary student resentment and reassure parents;

2c. investigate ways for parents to increase their skills in areas where they would like greater participation, but feel uncertain about their skill level, for example in homework support, policy advice, IEP evaluation, teaching strategies or student management.

3a. Continue to exhibit the personal professional qualities noticed and appreciated by parents that promote strong rapport and effective, harmonious partnerships; qualities such as flexibility, openness and warmth were highly significant to parents. Continue to work as a team, sharing common goals and consensus decisions. Straightforward, jargon-free speech was also appreciated and should be maintained. Further, continue to allow time and expect relationships to mature over an extended period of time; the key teacher provision which ensured continuity from year to year is a central component of staff continuity. Also,

3b. investigate ways to ensure

- *all* parents and students feel valued and equal;
- staff understand the barriers limiting parents' full and equitable participation, and all parents and students are in fact provided with the necessary supports and information enabling them to contribute equally in discussion and decision-making, and share in on-going processes throughout the year;
- teachers and parents do not have an expectation that special education staff are experts who need little or no support. Collaborative partnerships can only be achieved if true equity exists and the term is not merely invoked;
- no barriers exist to parents participating to the extent they wish, in ways that are comfortable for them. Including barriers to (a) asking questions and seeking to learn more, (b) challenging decisions, (c) seeking opportunities to view student work, or (d) providing advice about their children;

- parents' aspirations and expectations are not merely assimilated into the dominant discourses of the school; these parents have a right to have their voices heard at full volume;
- school policy is unequivocal regarding the partnership rights of parents and that practice reflects the policy.

6.5 REPORT CONCLUSION

Broadly, this study has sought to investigate and evaluate what happens at the interface between home and school for parents whose children are involved in special education at Midland High School. In so doing, a model (relationship matrix, Fig. 5) has been developed to marshal the diversity of participant perspective alongside other information and quantitative data. Ordering data in this way has resulted in detailed and specific discussion related to three broad spheres of influence within the environment, and a series of broad recommendations. While significant gaps regarding communication and equity remain, it cannot be said that collaborative partnerships, as described by Blue-Banning et al. (2004) exist fulsomely at this school or indeed at any school where managerial controls dictate aspects of the process or unspoken rules influence outcomes. However, the outstanding relationships described by all verbal participants are testimony to an exceptional set of people who demonstrate the determination to achieve the best possible outcomes for each other in a complex environment.

This school demonstrated many practices that were not only valued but were also considered of a high standard when viewed against the current literature. It is hoped that the matrix model will provide a structure for maintaining and celebrating those positive practices, while revealing, acknowledging and acting on those areas which are shown to need development.

GLOSSARY

Abbreviations, and terms as used within the context of this study

<i>ACC</i>	Accident Compensation Corporation. Government agency resourcing students whose disabilities are the result of accident or abuse.
<i>ASDAN</i>	Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network. Students participate in the Youth Award Scheme section of this network.
<i>CCS</i>	community based charity which provides services to students with physical disabilities and their families. Formerly the Crippled Children's Society.
<i>Deaf</i>	a language and culture with a strong identity within the school. Deaf people in this setting insist on the use of a capital 'D' when referring to them or their culture.
<i>disability</i>	restriction or lack of ability to perform activities generally considered within the normal human range (Neilson, 2000)
<i>hui</i>	meeting which observes Māori protocols
<i>ICT</i>	information communication technology, including, in this setting, assistive technology such as computers, Braille machines and communication software
<i>IHC</i>	a community based charity providing services to students with intellectual disabilities. Formerly the Intellectually Handicapped Children's Society.
<i>inclusion</i>	or 'belonging', the concept that "all schools should, without question, provide for the needs of all the children in their communities" (Foreman, 2005, p.12)
<i>integration</i>	"attendance at or participation in activities at a regular school" (Foreman, 2005, p.9). Integration may be little more than sharing the same school grounds.
<i>key teachers</i>	those special education teachers whose job included the support of allocated individual students
<i>Māoritanga</i>	Māori identity and cultural perspective
<i>parent</i>	adults within the family/ whānau with significant responsibility for the student, who are considered to be parents by the group. All family participants in the study were parents. The discussion is therefore restricted mainly to parents' involvement. However, where a more

general frame of reference seems useful, the terms ‘family’ and ‘whānau’ have been used.

<i>pastoral support</i>	holistic care provided by school staff, often whānau teachers, deans or special education key teachers
<i>powhiri</i>	formal Māori welcoming ceremony
<i>family</i>	group of closely associated people who regard themselves as a ‘family’ although they may not live together or be related by blood or marriage
<i>whānau</i>	extended family, often of deep significance for Māori families and often the decision making unit
<i>kapa haka</i>	Māori cultural performing groups, which also serve functions related to the welfare of Māori students within the school
<i>rumaki</i>	immersion in Māori language and culture
<i>special education</i>	support for “students who have educational, social or physical needs that cannot be fully met within the regular school programme” (see Appendix A for school policies)
<i>tīpuna</i>	ancestors
<i>whānau time</i>	administration and pastoral period, where a group of students of mixed ages meet daily. Students generally remain with the same group and teacher throughout their time at the school.
<i>whānau teacher</i>	teacher responsible for a group of students at whānau time
<i>wider-school</i>	aspects of school life falling outside the boundaries of the special education department

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APPENDIX A

SCHOOL POLICIES

Appendix A1: Statement of Objectives and Service Performance

Statement of Objectives and Service Performance

For the year ended 31 December 2003

Guiding Principals

The Board of Trustees of Freyberg High School acknowledges the importance of the guiding principle for the school's activities, which states:-

Innovates, cares and excels.

He toi mātauranga, he mana tangata.

Critical Strategic Issues

The school community has identified the following eight critical strategic issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the shared vision for Freyberg is achieved, and that the school continues to provide an excellent education for its students into the new millennium.

- *Monitoring and evaluating student achievement, and identifying and removing barriers to student learning.*
- *Improving literacy and numeracy levels and Maori student achievement throughout the school.*
- *Supporting excellence in teacher performance.*
- *Improving management systems, processes, procedures and operating structures.*
- *Improving communications within the school, and with parents.*
- *Effectively manage the projected growth in the school roll.*
- *Develop centres of excellence in areas of the curriculum.*
- *Improving the school facilities.*
- *Promoting the school.*

Appendix A2: Learning Support Policy

POLICY STATEMENT

Learning Support

Rationale:

Students who have educational, social or physical needs that cannot be fully met within the regular school programme, will be catered for by the Learning Support Faculty within budget constraints.

Purpose:

- 1 To ensure that the Learning Support Faculty is managed effectively.
- 2 To ensure that each year, students with special needs are identified and appropriately placed within the school.
- 3 To ensure that quality programmes following the New Zealand curriculum are planned, implemented and evaluated for students within the Faculty.
- 4 To ensure that a range of success-orientated, inclusive, educational and social opportunities are provided for all students with special needs.
- 5 To ensure that each year, the staffing allocation for identified students is used correctly.
- 6 To ensure that each year, funds are used appropriately.
- 7 To ensure that each year, teaching time, associate staff assistance, support services, teaching resources and equipment are allocated equitably.
- 8 To ensure that the partnership with parents/caregivers and whanau is respected and encouraged.

Guidelines:

- 1 Each year, students with special needs will be identified in consultation with contributing schools, parents/guardians and others as appropriate.
- 2 A Special Needs register of identified students will be developed and updated each year. An individual file will also be developed and maintained for each ORRS student and others as appropriate.
- 3 Individual Educational Programmes (IEPs) will be developed to meet the special teaching needs of each verified student on the Ongoing Reviewable

- Resourcing Scheme (ORRS) at least twice a year and other students as appropriate. Quality classroom programmes will be offered.
- 4 Where appropriate, students will attend regular classes. To this end, positive working relationships with other staff and students will be established and maintained by Faculty staff. Regular classroom teachers who have a student with special needs in their class will be given a profile of that student. They will also be given as much assistance and support as possible by Learning Support Faculty staff.
 - 5 The social and cultural self-awareness of these students will be fostered and school-wide and community acceptance of students with special needs will be encouraged.
 - 6 Each year, both the ORRS generated and formula-based staffing will be used across the Faculty for students with special needs according to need.
 - 7 The ORRS budget is maintained separately from other funding in the Faculty and reported on regularly to the Ministry of Education.
 - 8 Each Specialist facility within the Faculty will be staffed and resourced according to need within budget constraints. Teaching resources and equipment will be developed and maintained to cater for the needs of students within the Faculty. Outside agencies will be accessed as necessary.
 - 9 Each year, appropriate transition programmes for students with special needs will be developed in collaboration with the students, parents/whanau and outside agencies.
 - 10 Regular liaison with, and reporting to, parents/caregivers and whanau will be a priority.
 - 11 The HOF, together with HODs and TICs will be responsible for the effective, efficient and equitable operation of the Faculty and will report regularly to the Management Committee and to the BOT.
 - 12 Any unspent ORRS Funding will be rolled over at the end of the year as per the Ministry of Education Guidelines

Approved:

Board: 26 August 2004

Appendix A3: Special Education Policy

POLICY STATEMENT

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Special Education</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Delivery of Co-ordinated Services</i></p>

Rationale:

This policy recognises the importance of a planned delivery of a co-ordinated service from specialists to ensure maximum benefits for students and their families.

Purpose:

- ◆ To actively work at promoting a partnership between students' families and education providers.
- ◆ To ensure that teaching, paraprofessional, therapy and specialist support, from both within the school, Ministry of Education and outside agencies are provided for students where needed.
- ◆ To ensure that the provision of a co-ordinated service for students in the ORRS is based on IEPs developed in consultation with parents.
- ◆ To ensure that effective programmes and improved educational and social outcomes are developed for students in the ORRS.
- ◆ To ensure that resources are used in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Guidelines:

- ◆ Students in the ORRS may need higher levels of assistance than can be provided by the class teacher. Where this occurs, outside services will be accessed.
- ◆ The students' designated keyworker will ensure that the appropriate people be invited to attend the IEP meeting. These may include other school personnel, specialist teachers, specialist service providers, therapists paraprofessionals and Ministry of Education personnel.
- ◆ Parents and/or guardians will be invited to attend.

- ◆ Every endeavour will be made to ensure that a specialist teacher or adviser attends each IEP meeting.
- ◆ Where other professionals are unable to attend an IEP meeting, a brief report will be requested.
- ◆ The roles of specialists and the outcomes for students will be reviewed at IEP meetings.

Approved:

Board: 26 August 2004

Appendix A4: Special Education Fundholding Policy

POLICY STATEMENT

Special Education Fundholding

Rationale:

This policy recognises that the school will become a fundholder for the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Scheme.

Purpose:

The school will become a fundholder for itself and other schools and will manage such funds in such a way that the students in the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Scheme will receive a quality education.

Guidelines:

- To ensure that ORRS funds are kept separated from the operating accounts of the school.
- To ensure that Individual Education Programmes (IEP) for each student will be the base document for meeting the education needs of each student.
- To ensure that procedures are in place to monitor the implementation of the IEP for students in other schools.
- To ensure that procedures are in place for the employment of paraprofessional, specialists and therapists working in other schools.
- To ensure that there are procedures in place for the reporting on issues relating to student safety in other schools including the reporting of abuse.
- To ensure that there are procedures for consultation with the students' parents/caregivers.

Approved:

Board: 26 August 2004

APPENDIX B

List of pseudonyms for participant groups

1. Parents:

Abby	Hepa	Joanne	Martha	Richard	Tipene
Cathryn	Hillary	Joy	Mata	Sarah	
Diane	Hine	Kate	May	Sheena	
Erma	Jacqui	Lauren	Michael	Sonia	
Henry	Janine	Marlene	Murial	Susan	

2. Students

Alana	Huata	Kitty	Mara	Paddy	Simon
Casey	Jack	Laura	Marie	Roberta	Tara
Damien	Johanna	Lottie	Marshall	Samuel	Tina
Emma	Kiri	Macey	Natalie	Sandy	

3. Teachers

Elaine	Jenny	Leanne	Renee	Scott
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APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PLANS

Appendix C1: Parent Interview Notes

<u>IEP Partnerships: Parent Interview Notes</u>			
Event: Participant number/s:		Date:	
<i>“ I want to find out what it is like to be a parent of a student with special needs at this school, and whether or not changes could be made to improve how school and families work together. I am interested in your general experiences in the school and the Special Education Department as well as the IEP process in particular. When I talk about the IEP process, I am interested in the whole process: What happens between meetings as well as the meetings themselves.”</i>			
Topics and probes	Descriptions	Reflections	Ref / Code
<p>1. First I would like to talk about what it is like to be the parent of an ORRS funded student in general at this school: What you think and feel as well as what happens. For example:</p> <p>a) What opportunities does the school / wider Special Education Department provide to ensure you feel included as a parent / caregiver?</p> <p>b) How are you kept informed or included by the school / department?</p> <p>c) How comfortable are you coming into the school / department / specific centre?</p> <p>d) How well are you supported by the school?</p> <p>e) Do you feel like an equal in the school? Why / why not?</p> <p>f) Do you feel you can raise issues / challenge the school / teachers? Why / Why not?</p> <p>g) Are you involved in any wider school / department groups or activities?</p>			

<p>h) Are there other ways you would like to be involved?</p> <p>i) What are the positive things about being a parent of an ORRS funded student in this school community?</p> <p>j) What are the negative aspects?</p> <p>k) If you could make changes what would they be?</p>			
<p>2. Next, I want to find out about the IEP process in particular, what goes on at each stage of the process and how your partnership with your child's IEP team has changed over time. I am interested in what you think as well as how feel about it. For example:</p> <p>a) Before an IEP meeting takes place</p> <p>i. Do you receive evaluations or reports from your key teacher / specialists / others on the IEP team, or complete your own evaluation before the meeting?</p> <p>ii. Do you prepare in advance to raise issues / discussion points / questions?</p> <p>iii. Do you read the previous IEP before you come?</p> <p>iv. How worthwhile is this part of the process?</p> <p>v. What changes, if any would you make to the preparation stage of the IEP process?</p>			
<p>b) During meetings</p> <p>i. What do you do at IEP meetings?</p> <p>ii. How do you feel at meetings? Do you feel the teacher understands your feelings?</p> <p>iii. Is there an opportunity to raise your own issues, or ask questions if you don't understand what is going on?</p> <p>iv. Do you get enough information to make decisions?</p> <p>v. Do you feel your opinions are valued and given full weight?</p>			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vi. Do you, or would you feel free to bring other people to the meetings? vii. In your opinion, are all the right people at the meetings? viii. What are the good aspects of the meetings? ix. What changes, if any, would you make to what happens at meetings? 			
<p>c) In between meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Do you work together with teachers on IEP objectives? How? ii. Do you meet / write notes or communicate in some other way with the school? iii. How well does this work? iv. How are problems arising between meetings dealt with? v. What contact do you have with regular classroom teachers? vi. What are the good aspects of what goes on between meetings? vii. Is there anything you would like to see changed about the way your child's programme is managed in between meetings? 			
<p>d) I want to understand how relationships with the school change over time, both the wider school and how the IEP partnership develops, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Is your experience different now compared with when your child first enrolled? ii. What has influenced the changes? iii. Has the school been responsive to the changing needs of you and your child? iv. Has the school provided the services you feel your child has needed over the time they have been at the school? v. What is good about the school's responsiveness? Could you give examples? vi. What would you like to change about the way the school responds to needs as they change over time? 			

<p>e) Overall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. As you know this is a “fundholder school”. ORRS money is managed directly by the school. How do you think this factor affects your relationship with the school and the IEP team? ii. Does the IEP process cover all the things you would like? Why / why not? iii. Does it deliver what your child needs? Why / why not? iv. Are the learning programmes meeting your child’s needs? Why / why not? v. Are the communication systems how you would them to be? Why/why not? vi. Do you feel involvement in IEPs requires too much or not enough of you as a parent? vii. What are the good aspects of your relationships within the IEP team? viii. What are the negative aspects? ix. Are there times during the IEP cycle that relationships are better than at other times? x. What would you like to change about the overall IEP process? 			
<p>3. Do you think there could be a better way to meet your needs and the needs of your child, other than the IEP process? What for example?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Are there other ways you would like to contribute? ii. Are there other ways the school could support you and your child? 			
<p>4. Is there anything else you would like to add or comment on?</p>			

Appendix C2: Teacher Interview Notes

IEP Partnerships: Teacher Interview Notes

Event:

Participant number:

Date:

“ I want to find out what relationships are like between parents of ORRS funded students and the school and whether or not changes could be made to improve how school and families work together. I am interested in your general thoughts about the school and the Special Education Department as well as the IEP partnership in particular. When I talk about the IEP partnership, I am interested in the whole process: What happens between meetings as well as the meetings themselves.”

Topics and probes	Descriptions	Reflections	Ref / Code
<p>1. First I would like to talk about what opportunities and supports are available for parents as partners in their child’s education, and what it is like to be the parent of an ORRS funded student in general at this school. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) What opportunities do the school / special education department / centre / teacher provide to ensure parents / families feel included? b) Do families take up the opportunities available? Why / why not? c) How do the school / department / key teachers communicate with parents? d) How well informed do you feel parents are by the school / department / centre? e) How welcoming do you feel the school / department / specific centre is for your parents? f) How frequently do parents raise issues / challenge the school / teachers? What influences this? g) Do you think parents are treated as equals by the school / department / centre? h) What should change? i) How could changes be made? 			

<p>2. Next, I want to find out about the IEP process in particular: What goes on at each stage of the process and how partnerships change over time. For example:</p> <p>a. Before an IEP meeting takes place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Do you provide evaluations or reports from yourself / specialists / others on the IEP team, prior to the meeting? ii. Do parents complete evaluations prior to meetings? iii. Do they usually prepare in advance to raise issues / discussion points / questions? iv. How worthwhile is the evaluation and preparation part of the IEP process? v. What changes, if any would you make to the preparation stage of the IEP process? 			
<p>b. During meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. What is your role at IEP meetings? ii. What is the parents' / whanau role? iii. Do they to raise their own issues / challenge or present alternative points of view? Why / why not? iv. How do you manage situations where parents' ideas are different from your own? v. How often do parents bring other people to the meetings? Why / why not? vi. In your opinion, are all the right people at the meetings? vii. Do you feel parents are well enough informed to understand their child's programme and to make decisions? viii. Can you describe the 'climate' at most meetings? ix. What are the good aspects of the meetings? x. What changes, if any, would you make to what happens at meetings? 			
<p>c. In between meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Do you work together with parents on IEP objectives? How? ii. Do you meet / write notes or communicate in some other way with them? iii. How well does this work? Why? 			

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iv. How are problems arising between meetings dealt with? v. What contact do parents have with regular classroom teachers or other team members? vi. What are the good aspects of what goes on between meetings? vii. Is there anything you would like to see changed about the way IEPs are managed over the time between meetings? 			
<p>d. I want to understand how relationships with the school , and IEP partnerships change over time. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Do you work differently with new parents compared with parents you have known for a long time? ii. Do you work differently with parents of junior students compared with parents of senior or transition students? iii. Have your methods changed overall since you joined the school staff? How? How long ago did you join? iv. What has influenced any of the above changes? v. Has the school / department / centre been responsive to the changing needs of your students/parents? How? Can you give examples? vi. What would you like to change about the way the school responds to needs as they change over time? vii. What improvements could be made in the way the school / the department / key teachers (including you) / other staff or specialists build and maintain relationships with parents? 			
<p>e. Overall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. How does the school’s “Fundholder” status affect the IEP partnerships? ii. Does the IEP process cover all the things you would like? Why / why not? 			

<p>iii. Does it deliver what students / parents and teachers need? Why / why not?</p> <p>iv. Are the students' learning programmes developed directly from the IEP decisions? What other factors are involved?</p> <p>v. Do the programmes meet the students' / parents' needs? Why / why not?</p> <p>vi. Are the communication systems how you would want them to be? Why / why not?</p> <p>vii. Do you feel involvement in IEPs requires too much or not enough of parents?</p> <p>viii. What are the good aspects of relationships within the IEP teams you coordinate?</p> <p>ix. What are the negative aspects?</p> <p>x. Are there times during the IEP cycle that relationships are better than at other times?</p> <p>xi. What would you like to change about the overall IEP process?</p>			
<p>3. Do you think there could be a better way to meet the needs of parents and students, other than the IEP process? What for example?</p> <p>i. Are there other ways parents could contribute?</p> <p>ii. Are there other ways the school could support ORRS students and their families?</p>			
<p>4. Is there anything else you would like to add or comment on?</p>			

Appendix C3: Student Interview Notes

IEP Partnerships: Student Interview Notes

Event:

Participant number/s:

Date:

"I want to find out what it is like for families when they have a young person with a disability (like you) at the school. I want to know what works really well and also if we could make changes so the school works better with families and for students"

Topics and probes	Descriptions	Reflections	Ref/Code
<p><i>"The questions I want to ask you are about how your parents and teachers work together to help you at school."</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do your parents / family or carers come to school for meetings with teachers? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. With special education teachers (IEP meetings or other meetings) b. With your other teachers? 2. Do you go to the meetings? 3. What happens at the meetings? 4. Do you understand what is being discussed / decided? 5. How do you feel about your parents being at school talking about your work and your special needs? 6. Do you say anything at the meetings? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. If yes, what do you talk about? b. If no, why don't you say anything? 7. Do you talk to your parents or teachers about things that were agreed at the meeting at different times in between meetings? 8. What other ways do your parents help you get on at school? 9. Do you think the meetings are helpful to you and your school work or school activities? Why / why not? Can you give examples? 10. What would you like to change about the meetings? 11. Is your family involved in any other ways with the school? 12. Senior students: Has the way your family works with the school changed over time? Why / Why not? 13. Would you like more changes to happen? 14. How could school help you and your family more? 15. Do you want to say anything else about school? 			

APPENDIX D

CONSENT DOCUMENTS

Appendix D1: Transcript Release Authority



Massey University
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Te Kupenga o Te Matauranga

LEARNING AND TEACHING
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
T 64 6 356 9099
F 64 6 351 3383
www.massey.ac.nz

**Secondary school students with disabilities:
Home / school partnerships**

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS

This form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview/s conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, Jane Wills in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....



Appendix D2: Confidentiality Agreement



Massey University
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New Zealand
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F 64 6 351 3383
www.massey.ac.nz

**Secondary school students with disabilities:
Home / school partnerships
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I (Full Name - printed)

agree to keep confidential all information concerning the project

..... (Title of Project).

Signature:

Date:



Appendix D3: Participant Consent Form



Massey University
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Te Kupenga o Te Matauranga

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New Zealand
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F 64 6 351 3383
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**Secondary school students with disabilities:
Home / school partnerships**

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

Please complete one form for each person taking part. If you are a student, your parent / caregiver will also need to sign.

I have read the Information Sheet and understand the details of the study. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature of Participant: _____ **Date:** _____
(Parent / teacher / student)

Full Name - printed _____

Signature of Parent / caregiver: _____ **Date:** _____
(If participant is a student)

Full Name - printed _____



Appendix D4: School Consent Form



Massey University
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Te Kupenga o Te Matauranga

LEARNING AND TEACHING
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
T 64 6 356 9099
F 64 6 351 3383
www.massey.ac.nz

**Secondary school students with disabilities:
Home / school partnerships**

CONSENT FORM: ACCESS TO AN INSTITUTION

To be signed by the Board of Trustees Chairperson

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and understand the details of the study. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

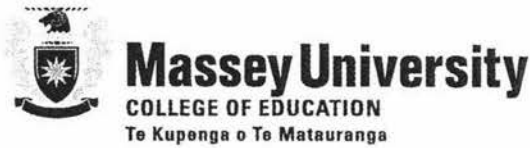
I agree/do not agree to allow access to Freyberg High School (in particular access to the pupil file data base, IEP documents, and school charter and policies) for the purposes of this research.

Signature of BOT Chairperson _____ Date: _____

Full Name: _____



Appendix D5: Parent Invitation to Participate / Information Sheet



LEARNING AND TEACHING
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
T 64 6 356 9099
F 64 6 351 3383
www.massey.ac.nz

Secondary school students with disabilities: Home / school partnerships

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE / INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Parent,

This letter is inviting you to participate in a research project I am carrying out for my Masters degree in Special Education. I will be studying how parents / caregivers / whanau and teachers work together on IEPs. I hope to identify things we do well and things that could be improved or changed altogether. Once the information has been gathered, I will write a case study report, and provide a summary to all participants.

You will all know me. I am Jane Wills: Head of Department – Special Education; Midland High School. Outside of school, my contacts are: [deleted].

My supervisor for the research is Dr. Jill Bevan-Brown. She can be contacted at: Massey University, Phone: 356 9099, extn: 8764; email: J.M.Bevan-Brown@Massey.ac.nz

I have sent an invitation and information to all ORRS funded students at Freyberg High, their parents or caregivers and their special education teachers. There are forty ORRS funded students.

All information will be confidential to me and my supervisor and will only be reported in general terms or through the use of an alias to ensure no individual can be identified. The information you give me will only be used for the purposes of the study. It will be stored securely and destroyed after five years: only the final report will remain. If I quote you in the report, you will have an alias and will not be recognisable.

I would like to observe as many IEP meetings and interview as many parents as possible. Interviews could be held at school or at home if you would prefer and you would be welcome to have a support person present. Interviews could be undertaken with only one parent or with both parents together, or with parents separately, depending on what arrangement suits you best.

If you agree, interviews will be tape recorded and the tapes transcribed. Transcriptions and tapes will be available for you to check and approve before the information is used. They will be kept secure along with any other information you give me.

I will also be collecting information from various documents such as IEP plans / evaluations / minutes, home/school log books and school documents such as policies and newsletters.

Most observations and interviews will take place in terms three and four this year. The interviews are expected to take round 45 minutes. Observations will be for the full length of your child's next IEP meeting (around one hour). It may also be necessary to ask you some questions or carry out another observation later, if I find I do not have enough information on a particular topic.

Your decision whether to take part or not, will have no effect on any other part of your relationship with me or the school. No-one's participation is dependent on anyone else's decision. For example, a student may decide to take part, but their parents or teacher may decide not to. If you have any questions at all about the study, please don't hesitate to contact either me or Dr. Bevan-Brown.

Your rights:

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation.

If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 04/74. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form included in this pack and return it to [name deleted] c/- School office, or post the enclosed stamped envelope by June 28th.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Yours Sincerely,

Jane Wills



Appendix D6: Teacher Invitation to Participate / Information Sheet



Massey University
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Te Kupenga o Te Matauranga

LEARNING AND TEACHING
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
T 64 6 356 9099
F 64 6 351 3383
www.massey.ac.nz

Secondary school students with disabilities: Home / school partnerships

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE / INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Teacher,

This letter is inviting you to participate in a research project I am carrying out for my Masters degree in Special Education. I will be studying how parents / caregivers / whanau and teachers work together on IEPs. I hope to identify things we do well and things that could be improved or changed altogether. Once the information has been gathered, I will write a case study report, and provide a summary to all participants.

Outside of school, my contacts are: [deleted].

My supervisor for the research is Dr. Jill Bevan-Brown. She can be contacted at: Massey University, Phone: 356 9099, extn: 8764; email: J.M.Bevan-Brown@Massey.ac.nz

I have sent an invitation and information to all ORRS funded students at Midland High, their parents or caregivers and their special education teachers.

All information will be confidential to me and my supervisor and will only be reported in general terms or through the use of an alias to ensure no individual can be identified. The information you give me will only be used for the purposes of the study. It will be stored securely and destroyed after five years: only the final report will remain. If I quote you in the report, you will have an alias and will not be recognisable.

I would like to observe as many IEP meetings and interview as many parents, teachers and students as possible. Interviews could be held at school or at home if you would prefer.

If you agree, interviews will be tape recorded and the tapes transcribed. Transcriptions and tapes will be available for you to check and approve before the information is used. They will be kept secure along with any other information you give me.

I will also be collecting information from various documents such as IEP plans / evaluations / minutes, home/school log books and school documents such as policies and newsletters.

Most observations and interviews will take place in terms three and four this year. The interviews are expected to take round 45 minutes. Observations will be for the full length of each IEP meeting (around one hour). The number of observations will depend on response rate to the parent invitation. The maximum number is the number of ORRS students on your roll. It may also be necessary to ask you some questions or carry out another observation later, if I find I do not have enough information on a particular topic.

Your decision whether to take part or not, will have no effect on any other part of your relationship with me or the school. No-one's participation is dependent on anyone else's decision. For example, a student may decide to take part, but their parents or teacher may decide not to. If you have any questions at all about the study, please don't hesitate to contact either me or Dr. Bevan-Brown.

Your rights:

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation.

If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 04/74. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form included in this pack and return it to [name deleted], c/- School office by June 28th.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Yours Sincerely,

Jane Wills



Appendix D7: Student Invitation to Participate / Information Sheet



LEARNING AND TEACHING
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
T 64 6 356 9099
F 64 6 351 3383
www.massey.ac.nz

Secondary school students with disabilities: Home / school partnerships

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE / INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Student,

This letter is inviting you to take part in a study I am doing at university. I want to find out how parents / caregivers / whanau and teachers work together on IEPs. I hope to identify things we do well and things that could be improved or changed altogether. I will be away from school for the rest of the year. When I come back next year, I will let you know what I found out.

You will know me because I work with some of you and I have been at most of your IEP meetings. Outside of school, my contacts are: [deleted].

My supervisor for the study is Dr. Jill Bevan-Brown. She can be contacted at:
Massey University, Phone: 356 9099, extn: 8764; email: J.M.Bevan-Brown@Massey.ac.nz

I have sent an invitation and information to all ORRS funded students at Midland High, your parents or caregivers and your special education teachers. There are forty ORRS funded students.

All information will be kept privately by me and my supervisor, and when I write my report, you will not be identified. The information you give me will only be used for the purposes of the study. It will be stored securely and destroyed after five years: only the final report will remain. If I quote you in the report, you will have an alias.

I would like to observe as many IEP meetings and interview as many students as possible. Interviews will be held at school and you would be welcome to have a support person present; you could choose to have a teacher aide, or a communicator.

If you agree, your interview will be tape recorded and the tapes written out. You can check what I have written before the information is used. Tapes will be kept secure along with any other information you give me. If you need support to read anything I write, or to help you understand, you can have someone to help you.

I will also be collecting information from various documents such as IEP plans / evaluations / minutes, home/school log books and school documents such as policies and newsletters.

Most observations and interviews will take place in terms three and four this year. The interviews are expected to take around 20 minutes. Observations will be for the full length of your next IEP meeting (around one hour). It may also be necessary to ask you some questions or carry out another observation later, if I find I do not have enough information on a particular topic.

Your decision whether to take part or not, will have no effect on any other part of your relationship with me or the school. No-one's participation is dependent on anyone else's decision. For example, you may decide to do an interview, but your parents or teacher may decide not to. If you have any questions at all about the study, please don't hesitate to contact either me or Dr. Bevan-Brown.

Your rights:

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation.

If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application 04/74. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form included in this pack and return it to [name deleted] c/- School office, or post the stamped envelope enclosed by June 28th.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Yours Sincerely,

Jane Wills



APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION DOCUMENTS

Appendix E1: Checklist for Meeting Observations

Checklist for meetings adapted from Salend (1998)

Event:

Date:

Participant Numbers:

Structure the environment to promote communication; the room in which the conference will take place can be organised for sharing information:

- Comfortable, same-size furniture can be used by all participants and arranged to promote communication.
- Barriers such as desks and chairs should not be placed between families and educators.
- Chairs can be placed around a table or positioned so that all participants can see each other.

To make sure that the meeting is not interrupted, educators can:

- Post a note on the door indicating that a conference is in session.
- Distractions caused by the telephone can be minimized by: taking the phone off the hook; asking the office to hold all calls; or using a room that does not have a phone.

Welcome:

- Welcome the participants verbally and non-verbally.
- Introduce parents and professionals, including an explanation of the roles of each professional and the services they provide to the student.

Conduct the conference:

Educators should conduct the conference in a manner that encourages parental understanding and participation.

- Beginning the meeting with pleasant informal conversation
- Offering something to drink can help participants feel comfortable and establish rapport.
- To facilitate participation and follow-up, teachers can ask participants if they would like pads and pencils to take notes.

Initially:

- Review the agenda and the stated purpose of the meeting.
- Review relevant information from previous meetings; attempt to reach consensus.
- The meetings can start on a positive note, with educators discussing positive aspects of the student's performance.
- Next, educators can review any concerns they have about the student.

- They can present data in a format that is understandable to parents
- Share with parents, materials such as work samples, test results, and anecdotal records to support and illustrate their comments.

Educators can solicit information from families:

- Asking them to discuss the issues or situations from their perspective.
- Asking them to respond to open-ended questions.
- Listening attentively; by being empathetic; by acknowledging and reinforcing participation (“That’s a good point; I’ll try to incorporate that”).
- Avoiding asking questions that have yes/no or implied answers.
- Asking parents questions that encourage them to respond rather than waiting for them to ask questions or spontaneously speak their minds.
- Informing parents that there may be several solutions to a situation.
- Refraining from criticising parents.
- Speaking to parents using language that is understandable but not condescending.
- Checking periodically for understanding; by paraphrasing and summarizing parents’ comments.
- Showing respect for families and their feelings.

Teachers can adjust the structure of the meeting to meet the families’ preferences:

- For families that value personal relationships, teachers can create a friendly, open, and personal environment by demonstrating concern for family members and using close proximity, self-disclosure, humour and casual conversation.
- Other families may be goal oriented and respond to professionals they perceive as competent. These families may look to educators to provide structure, set goals, define roles, and ask questions of family members.

Conclude the conference with:

- Summary of the issues discussed
- Points of agreement and disagreement
- Strategies to be used to resolve problems
- Roles to be assumed by parents and educators
- At the end of the meeting parents and educators can:
 - Agree on a plan of action
 - Establish ongoing communication systems
 - Determine appropriate dates for the next meeting.

Evaluate the conference:

- Were participants prepared for the meeting?
- Did the meeting address the issues parents wanted to discuss?
- Did the room make parents feel comfortable?
- Did parents have sufficient time to present their opinion?
- Did parents appear satisfied with the way the meeting was conducted?
- Which aspects of the meeting did parents appear to appreciate?
- Which did they appear to like the least?
- Did parents appear satisfied with the outcome(s) of the meeting?

Salend (1998, pp.134-136)

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE MEMOS

<u>IEP Partnership: Memo</u>		
Event: Interview		
Date: 230704		
Descriptions	Reflections:	Ref / Code
Culture Assimilation	Joy commented that she felt that the focus should always be on the child. To help grow and encourage - not whether the school could be supported to "do this or that" Talking about assimilation into the school culture and systems.	IP3 P3; Joy Also see Fraser

<u>IEP Partnership: Memo</u>		
Event: Reading Paul et al.		
Date: 2/9/4		
Descriptions	Reflections:	Ref / Code
Diversity Culture Teacher Education	Paul et al. - Educators would need to, but have not "come to terms with the diversity of interests now represented in schools. Ethnicity, gender, ability, behaviour, ideology - all are constructed in the vision of the majority culture and understood, often exclusively, in the moral and epistemological image of the modern world. The education of teachers, no less than the education of the students they teach, has reflected the traditional insensitivity to diversity. " p230.	File: Theories\ Whole School Also see P3, P19

<u>IEP Partnership: Memo</u>		
Event: Reading Sailor		
Date: 3/10/4		
Descriptions	Reflections:	Ref / Code
Fundholding	Sailor promotes the idea of site-based management such as this school has for the management and dispersment of resources (ORRS fundholder). He see s the devolution of authority and management to schools as an important step towards development of a unified and integrated approach to the various resources entering the school. p18. c.f. Parents – they concur - see interviews.	File: Theories\ Whole School Also see Wylie

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS SUMMARY

With each transcript

1. highlight important points;
2. re-read each and review decisions;
3. ask a colleague to mark one or two and moderate initial decisions;
4. go through the highlights and categorise or code into themes;
5. review themes and re-code, combine or eliminate if necessary;
6. go through each transcript again and code each highlight against the list of themes, noting any unable to be coded or questionable;
7. rework categories / themes if necessary;
8. make up two analysis grids (count & meaning) for each group of interviewees, one large enough to include quotes; number categories and interviewees;
9. assign each highlight a category number;
10. use an 'other' or 'unclassifiable' category as well for important but unique comments;
11. tick the appropriate square in the 'count' analysis grids;
12. enter quotes in the 'meaning' analysis grids;
13. review and report on the data in conjunction with other analysed data.

(after Gillham, 2002)

APPENDIX H

DATA ANALYSIS CODES

Data Analysis Codes		
Code	Section	Description
1	1	Wider-school relationships: description, opportunities
2		Wider-school school relationships: description, communication
3		Wider-school school relationships: description, support
4		Wider-school school relationships: positive perception
5		Wider-school school relationships: negative perception
6		Wider-school school relationships: suggestions
7		Wider-school school relationships: other
8	2	Sp. Ed. relationships: description, opportunities
9		Sp. Ed. relationships: description, communication
10		Sp. Ed. relationships: description, support
11		Sp. Ed. relationships: positive perception
12		Sp. Ed. relationships: negative perception
13		Sp. Ed. relationships: suggestions
14		Sp. Ed. relationships: other
15	3	a. IEP partnerships: description, before meetings
16		b. IEP partnerships: description, during meetings
17		c. IEP partnerships: description, between meetings
18		a. IEP partnerships: positive perception, before meetings
19		a. IEP partnerships: negative perception, before meetings
20		a. IEP partnerships: suggestions, before meetings
21		b. IEP partnerships: positive perception, during meetings
22		b. IEP partnerships: negative perception, during meetings
23		b. IEP partnerships: suggestions, during meetings
24		c. IEP partnerships: positive perception, between meetings
25		c. IEP partnerships: negative perception, between meetings
26		c. IEP partnerships: suggestions, between meetings
27	4	IEP partnerships: change, description
28		IEP partnerships: positive perception, change
29		IEP partnerships: negative perception, change
30		IEP partnerships: suggestions, change
31	5	IEP partnerships: overall, description,
32		IEP partnerships: positive perception, overall
33		IEP partnerships: negative perception, overall
34		IEP partnerships: suggestions, overall
35	6	IEP partnerships: other
36		Non-specific: other