8-2015

Theories-in-use and espoused theories: An examination of team decision-making in the initial special education eligibility meeting

Heather Anne Stewart
University of Tennessee - Knoxville, hstewar4@vols.utk.edu

www.manaraa.com

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Heather Anne Stewart entitled "Theories-in-use and espoused theories: An examination of team decision-making in the initial special education eligibility meeting." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Educational Psychology and Research.

John M. Peters, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Pamela Angelle, Melinda Gibbons, Mary Ziegler

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Theories-in-use and espoused theories: An examination of team decision-making in the

initial special education eligibility meeting

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Heather Anne Stewart

August 2015

Dedication

My dissertation is dedicated to all children who are evaluated for educationally-related

disabilities and to their parents who advocate for them. As an education professional, my

goal is to continuously serve children with disabilities meaningfully and appropriately.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere appreciation and heartfelt gratitude to John Peters, Ed.D., whose *way of being* has influenced *my way of being*. During my collaborative learning studies, the members of the CL-6 cohort; Patti Long, Anton Reese, Chris Coyne, and myself all became more reflective and collaborative in our practices. While our unique journeys separate us, *our ways of being continue to connect us*.

I am grateful to all my professors within the University of Tennessee's College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences who have been integral in shaping me as a perpetual teacher and learner. First and foremost, I am indebted to John Peters, who remained steadfast and supportive even when I wandered; thank you for seeing me through, particularly after your own retirement. I must acknowledge three indelible influences John has afforded me. First, your campus fame is in your candle's flame. Due to your weekly flickering flame, I am more reflective as a practitioner and as a person; thank you. Second, you have given the gift of "X;" an entity that is *more than* and *different than* each time we meet. Lastly, I seek to know and understand by using your simple and infamous phrase, "Say more…" Dr. Peters, thank you for who you are and what you have done for me and so many others.

I give special thanks to Pamela Angelle, Ph.D., from the Department of Education Leadership and Policy Studies, who has been more of a central force in my professional development than she realizes. During my cognate studies, I found myself intrigued with school reform, leadership theories, and communication styles. As a dissertation

committee member, Dr. Angelle was supportive at all phases. Thank you for believing in me and supporting me through the end.

I appreciate the querying posed to me by committee member, Melinda Gibbons, Ph.D. from the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling. Dr. Gibbons' queries reminded me to think in ways beyond the surface. I am grateful to Mary Ziegler, Ed.D. from the Adult Education and Applied Educational Psychology Programs for her critical review to my written document followed by her supportive input at my oral defense. Dr. Ziegler graciously stepped in as a committee member at a critical time of need; her willingness to step in without having early input speaks to her professionalism and service to others.

Obtaining my doctorate was visionary. Many personal and situational obstacles were present. However, when the opportunity presented itself for me to pursue what was seemingly unachievable, I stretched and reached. I absolutely could not have sustained myself without the love and support of my family. Valerie, thank you for your patience; it has not been easy and it has not been fair. It is time to turn the tables, 40-60. Morgan, thank you for your continuous encouragement to pursue my dreams, particularly when life was over-whelming and unfair. Your determination and dedication is inspirational. Erica, thank you for your giving me grace when all you have ever known is, "Mama is studying." Our reunion is long past due, and I look forward to it. Arianna and Ryan, thank you for your collegial support. We did it; three doctoral degrees in one year! It is time to live our lives with family and friends boating biking backpacking, and traveling. I appreciate my parents imparting their value of higher education. Moreover, I am thankful

my parents have been patient and supportive as I traversed many paths. Mom, thank you for patiently waiting and supporting me. Dad, I did it! I know you would be proud. My decade of study has challenged all of us, and my words are insufficient. I dedicate my newfound time to nurturing, supporting, and giving back to those I love; Valerie, Mom, Erica, Morgan, Arianna and Ryan, Dylan and Samara, Blaine and Shelley.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether education professionals' theories-in-use were congruent with their espoused theories (Argyris & Schön, 1974) regarding the inclusion of parents as team decision-making partners in the initial special education eligibility meeting of individualized education programming (IEP) teams. Particular attention was given to procedural practices education professionals used to include parents as decision-making partners and their descriptions of this practice.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates the inclusion of parents as members of IEP teams, including their right to participate in the special education eligibility decision. Research supports the inclusion of parents as essential members of IEP teams, and their active participation is reported as pivotal for their children's positive educational and social outcomes. Local education agency (LEA) representatives, special education teachers, and school psychologists are responsible for including parents in eligibility decision-making; thus they were the focus of this study.

A total of 24 education professionals in eight schools from three Southeastern school districts constituted the research participants. Participants were observed in initial eligibility meetings and responded to a questionnaire and interview questions with descriptions of their procedural practices. Findings showed that education professionals' described practices were more aligned to federal requirements than were their actual practices. Findings also showed that a subgroup of participants, LEA representatives, had limited knowledge of special education procedures.

Implications of the study include the need for additional training designed to strengthen education professionals' alignment of actual and espoused theories, particularly in the area of including parents as team decision-making partners.

Keywords: decision-making, eligibility meetings, theories-of-action

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Students with special needs may be identified as having an educationally-related disability that prevents them from acquiring and retaining curriculum similar to their peers. These students may require customized services to increase their self-sufficiency and success. Individualized education program (IEP) teams determine if students need special education services.

In American public education, team decision-making is legally mandated because it provides "greater accuracy in assessment, classification, and special education decisions; a forum for the sharing of differing values and perspectives; the provision for specialized consultative services to school personnel, parents, and community agencies; and the resources for developing innovative programs and/or evaluating existing ones" (Pfeiffer, 1981, p. 330). These benefits have ensured team decision-making remains a requirement for the IEP process (Boyd, Odom, Humphreys, & Sam, 2010; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Malone & Gallagher, 2010; Pfeiffer, 1980, 1981; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011; Woods & Wetherby, 2003; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Mitchell, 1982) since 1975 with the inception of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975).

The law's most recent iteration, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), states that "a group of qualified professionals *and the parent of the child* [emphasis added] determines whether the child is a child with a disability" (34 C.F.R. §300.8(a) 2006). As such, initial IEP teams (e.g., eligibility teams) must include the student's parents, a general education teacher, a special education

teacher, appropriate assessment specialists qualified to interpret evaluation results (e.g., school psychologist, speech-language pathologist, or audiologist), and a local education agency (LEA) representative (e.g., school principal, building-level administrator, or program supervisor) (34 C.F.R. § 300.321).

For younger children (pre-school through elementary school), the initial IEP team members examine the following factors to determine eligibility for special education: the acquisition of developmental milestones, the ability to participate and manage (e.g., physically, intellectually, and/or emotionally) in the child's routine childcare setting (e.g., home environment, preschool, parents' day out program, or daycare) or elementary classroom (kindergarten – fifth grade), attendance, present performance levels, work samples, grades, criterion-based data and norm-referenced test results, medical and/or mental health diagnoses, and social/behavioral concerns. From this collective evaluative data, the IEP team determines special education eligibility (34 C.F.R. § 300.306(c)(i), 2006; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Rostollan, & Shin, 1981).

Procedural requirements, outlined in the *Federal Register of IDEA* (2006), are intended to facilitate team decision-making for this initial eligibility meeting. Relatedly, adherence (or lack of adherence) to these procedural requirements generates outcomes that serve as a precursor for future working relationships between the parents and the education professionals (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Nowell & Salem, 2007; Rock & Bateman, 2009; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988). Adherence done with thoughtful educator-parent collaboration is likely to construct a positive and responsive culture for future meetings (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Lentz, 2012).

As Fish (2008) noted, "positive and equal interaction between educators and parents [are] likely to enhance the effectiveness of IEP meetings" (p. 12). Moreover, when a strong bond of trust exists between parents and educators, this relationship benefits the child (Stoner, Bock, Thompson, Angell, Heyl, & Crowley, 2005).

Since parental and professional interactions affect IEP meeting outcomes, those interactions are crucial. Initial eligibility meetings are particularly important because they incalculably effect that child's life (Boyd, Odom, Humphreys, & Sam, 2010; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011; Woods & Wetherby, 2003). According to Garda (2004), the determination of an educational disability and the need for special education services is "one of the most important, if not the most important, decision that will ever be made in that person's life" (p. 444).

However, collaboration can be difficult because attendees do not approach the meeting on equal footing. For many educational professionals, establishing a child's eligibility or ineligibility is a procedural routine; as such, sensitivity to parents' emotions may be minimized (Annan & Priestley, 2011; Frost, Rogers, O'Bryon, & Perry, 2010; Harnett, 2012). While for parents, this process may be the first time they recognize their child could need specialized services. Eligibility consideration may affect parents' perceptions of the child and of themselves as competent parents (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Garda, 2004; Goepel, 2009; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988). The eligibility issue may have emotional implications, which can further disadvantage the parent (Boyd, Odom, Humphreys, & Sam, 2010; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Garda, 2004; Goepel, 2009; Huebner & Gold, 1991; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011).

Studies show this decision-making event can be sensitive, yet most education professionals receive little or no formal training for this event (Frost, Rogers, O'Bryon, & Perry, 2010; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Huebner & Gould, 1991; Parr, Jones, & Bradley, 2006). When specifically asked, LEA representatives acknowledge their lack of understanding of special education services and laws (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006). Special education teachers have pedagogical knowledge but limited legal and procedural knowledge specific to special education eligibility (Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Harris, 2010; Malone & Gallagher, 2010). School psychologists have specialized training in assessment, but often have limited knowledge of special education procedural practices or in conveying assessment information, particularly difficult information, to parents (Annan & Priestley, 2011; Frost, Rogers, O'Bryon, & Perry, 2010).

At this pivotal time, miscommunication, misunderstanding, disagreement, and conflict continue to arise despite decades of legislative mandates and procedural requirements designed to support education professionals with team decision-making practices (Feinberg & Vacca, 2000; Ingraham, 1989; Mills & Duff-Mallams, 1999; Nowell & Salem, 2007). In an effort to learn more about education professionals' compliance with procedural requirements that are designed to include team decision-making, this study uses Argyris and Schön's (1974, 1978) theories-of-action frame, which is particularly well-suited as a diagnostic tool bringing awareness of people's actions and the procedural knowledge that drives those actions.

This examination began by observing the education professionals' practices followed by seeking their descriptions of practices regarding positioning parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting. According to the theory-of-action frame, the manner in which people behave and act (theories-in-use) are influenced by governing variables; that is, their knowledge and understanding, including personal goals, values, and beliefs (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Theories-in-use are people's knowledge and understanding reflected in the behaviors that drive their actions (Savaya & Gardner, 2012).

According to the theory-of-action frame, people's behaviors are purposeful, and not by chance; that is, behaviors are goal-driven, guided by theories-in-use and espoused theories. Espoused theories are the internal thoughts of what people know and understand, including their personal goals, values, and beliefs (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Savaya & Gardner, 2012). Espoused theories are, upon request, what we communicate to others to describe, explain, justify or predict actions and interactions (practices) (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

This study compares education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) and described practices (espoused theories) to specific procedural requirements (*Federal Register,* 2006) associated with the federal mandate, IDEA (2004). Personal thoughts, goals, values, and beliefs are considered inherent features of human thought and feeling; therefore, they are features within the education professionals' observed and described practices. This study focuses on education professionals' compliance to procedural requirements, personal features are not isolated and assessed. As a diagnostic tool,

theories-of-action account for knowing if what people espouse is congruent with their external actions. When a person's espoused theories are consistent with their theories-in-use, the two are congruent with little room for disparity. In contrast, when espoused theories are not consistent with their theories-in-use, the two are incongruent and room for disparity exists. Through the theories-of-action lens, congruence or incongruence is identified. When incongruence is identified, actions can be implemented to address the incongruence and effect change.

Theories-in-use are extrapolated from a person's actions because even when specifically asked, people are often unable to explain the why or the how of their actions. These uneasily articulated actions (theories-in-use) are often described as tacit (Polanyi, 1967), habitual (Cook & Brown, 1999), and automated (Eraut, 2000). The degree to which theories-in-use and espoused theories are related indicates congruence between what is said and what is done. When a person's theories-in-use (what we do) and espoused theories (what we say, or think, we do) are congruent, outcomes are more inclined to be effective and satisfying (Harnett, 2012; Moecker, 1989; Savaya & Gardner, 2012; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006).

In this study, practices that aligned to *Federal Register* (2006) requirements and were congruent to one another strengthened parents' role as team decision-making partners. While each individual practice may affect parents' positioning, the congruence of all three practices is likely to engender greater positioning. Increased positioning contributes to 'equal footing' as parents collaborate with education professionals and make some of the most important decisions that will ever be made in their child's life.

However, it is not uncommon for one's theories-in-use and espoused theories to be incongruent (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978; Moecker, 1989). As such, outcomes are less inclined to be effective and satisfying (Harnett, 2012; Moecker, 1989; Savaya & Gardner, 2012; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006).

Thus, within the confines of this study, the implications of education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) were compared with descriptions of practices (espoused theories) regarding the practices of positioning parents as decision-making partners. Identifying the congruence or incongruence between what is done and what is described may provide insight into team decision-making, particularly within the context of initial eligibility meetings. In turn, findings may be used to reduce the inordinate number of eligibility decisions mired in conflict.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine whether education professionals' theories-in-use were congruent to their espoused theories regarding the positioning of parents as team decision-making partners in the initial special education eligibility meeting. This examination focuses on education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use), descriptions of practice (espoused theories), and the congruence or lack of congruence between their theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding positioning parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting. Special education law (IDEA, 2004) entitles parents' IEP team membership with decision-making rights when determining whether the child is a child with a disability and needs special education and related services (34 C.F.R. § 300.306(a-c), 2006). However,

parents' participation relies heavily on the education professionals' practices of positioning parents as team decision-making partners. This study is needed because parents typically do not have knowledge or understanding of their rights and responsibilities as team decision-making partners. Thus, it is the responsibility of the education professionals to follow proper procedure so parents are positioned to be active and equal IEP team members. This study analyzed data from LEA representatives, special education teachers, and school psychologists because they are the education professionals legally liable and ethically responsible for parents' IEP team membership with decision-making rights in the initial eligibility meeting.

Research Questions

This study was designed to examine education professionals' observed practices and their descriptions of practices concerning the legal mandate of parents as team decision-making partners in initial eligibility meetings. When the two practices were consistent, the relationship between these two was identified as congruent. When the two practices were not consistent, the relationship between these two was identified as incongruent. Using the theories-in-use and espoused theories elements from Argyris and Schön's (1974) theories-of-action frame, the following queries were intended to elicit empirical evidence specific to the research focus:

1. How do education professionals position parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting? (Theories-in-Use)

2. How do education professionals describe positioning parents as team decision-making partners during the initial eligibility meeting? (Espoused Theories)

3. What is the relationship between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting? (Congruence/Incongruence)

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined and used by this study's researcher:

1. *<u>Congruence</u>*: One of three elements in the theory-of-action model; congruence/incongruence is the intermediate element between theory-in-use and espoused theory. Congruence is the extent to which an education professional's observed practice is consistent with their described practice. Here, when an education professional's observed practice (theory-in-use) and their description of practice (espoused theory) is consistent, the relationship between the two is identified as congruent (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

2. *<u>Consistent</u>:* The extent to which an education professional's observed practice is congruent (e.g., similar or related) to their described practice.

3. *<u>Elements</u>:* The three components constituting the theory-of-action frame. The first element is theory-in-use (e.g., observed actions); the second element is espoused theory (e.g., described actions); the third element is congruence or incongruence. In the theory-of-action frame, theory-in-use and espoused theory, are compared for consistency. When these elements are consistent, the relationship between these two elements is identified as congruent; conversely, when these elements are not consistent, the relationship between these two elements is identified as incongruent.

4. *__Espoused Theory__*: One of three elements in the theory-of-action model. This element may be used to describe, explain, justify, and predict a person's actions and interactions. This element, upon request, is communicated to others. Here, it is an education professional's description of practice; that is, what the professional says (or thinks) is done (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

5. *__Incongruence__*: One of three elements in the theory-of-action model; congruence/incongruence is the intermediate element between theory-in-use and espoused theory. Incongruence is when an education professional's observed practice is not consistent with their described practice. Here, when an education professional's observed practice (theories-in-use) and their description of practice (espoused theories) is inconsistent, the relationship between the two is identified as incongruent (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

6. *__Position/Positioning__*: To include or support. Here, within the context of initial eligibility meetings, the education professional positions (e.g., includes or supports) parents as team decision-making partners.

7. *__Practices__*: An education professional's actions and interactions that are observed and described. An observed practice includes the actions and interactions demonstrated by an education professional during the initial eligibility meeting. A described practice includes the actions and interactions, related to the initial eligibility meeting, which is described by an education professional.

8. ***Theory-in-Use***: One of three elements in the theory-of-action model. It is the external actions or behaviors a person does, governed by a person's knowledge and understanding. This element tends to be tacit and generally unknown to people; hence, it is considered the most authentic of views. Theory-in-use can only be determined by observation. Here, it is an education professional's observed practice; that is, what the education professional does (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

9. ***Theory-of-Action***: A conceptual frame consisting of three elements; theory-in-use, espoused theory, and congruence/incongruence between the two theories. The theory of purposeful human behavior, which for the education professional, is their observable practice (theory-in-use), but which, when attributed to the professional, serves to describe, explain, or predict the professional's behavior (espoused theory). Important to theory-of-action is the congruence, or lack of congruence, between theories-in-use (observed actions) behaviors) and espoused theories (described observations) (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Delimitations and Limitations

This research endeavor was organizationally and legally bound by the policies of the U.S. Department of Education, the rules and regulations of the state department, the policies of the local school districts, the procedures of the school districts' special education departments, and the routines of each school setting. This study was administered within the University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board's policy

guidelines and focused on the initial IEP eligibility meetings for children, preschool through elementary school, in one Southeastern U.S. state.

Practical, researcher-imposed delimitations and external variables helped define this study's site and participant selections. One delimitation was to confine research sites to elementary schools. Another delimitation was to eliminate duplication of education professionals as research participants in IEP meetings. These delimitations, combined with relatively small school districts and schools, led to the decision to observe only one initial eligibility meeting per elementary school.

The external variable of timing impacted data collection. Three time-sensitive variables interfered with data collection during late spring of the traditional academic year; school districts' week-long spring holidays, school systems' system-wide achievement testing, and few schools still had initial eligibility meetings scheduled as the academic year was drawing to a close. These cumulative factors decreased accessibility to a number of IEP meetings.

Practice and research implications are limited to pubic educational settings specifically offering special education services for preschoolers (ages 3-5) or elementary-age children (kindergarten through fifth grade). Second, findings and implications are specific to procedural practices in school districts and schools in the Southeastern United States. Local customs and social mores may have influenced participants; thus, not all results are generalizable to other regions in the United States. Third, the school districts' refusal to allow researchers to record IEP meetings limited data to approximated, rather than verbatim, scripting of the participants' conversation. Fourth, findings were limited to

LEA representatives, special education teachers, and school psychologists because each of these discipline-specific professional groups is obligated to know IDEA (2004) (Hess, Molina, & Kozleski, 2006). The perceptions of parents, other education assessment specialists (e.g., speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and audiologists), and general education teachers were not addressed in this study. No assumptions should be made about any other groups within the selected IEP meeting, school or school district. Fourth, due to reduced sample size, no attempt is made to generalize this study's findings; however, when regarding this study's delimitations, findings may be transferable to similar settings.

Significance of the Study

This study addressed a gap in the literature. Published research examines the following:

- parents' participation in IEP team meetings (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008; Feinberg & Vacca, 2000; Fish, 2006, 2008; Gilliam, 1979; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Kohler, 1999; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Nowell & Salem, 2007; Pfeiffer, 1980; Pruitt, Wandry, & Hollums, 1998; Rock, 2000; Rogers, 2002, 2003; Salas, 2004; Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003; Stoner & Angell, 2006; Stoner et al., 2005; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988);

- education administrators' practices in IEP team meetings (Mehan, 1983; Pfeiffer, 1980; Wakeman Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006; Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, & Maxwell, 1978; Ysseldyke, 1983);

- special education teachers' practices in IEP team meetings (Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Harris, 2010; Malone & Gallagher, 2010); and

- school psychologists' practices in IEP team meetings (Annan & Priestley, 2011; Frost, Rogers, O'Bryon, & Perry, 2010; Huebner & Gould, 1991).

While these research studies explored IEP team members' participation and practices, none examined the congruence or incongruence of education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding adherence to the *Federal Register's* (2006) requirements. These requirements are intended to ensure education professionals comply with the federal mandate (IDEA, 2004) that parents are IEP team members with decision-making rights during initial the initial eligibility meeting.

In this accountability era, the practices of positioning parents as decision-making partners is important. This study discloses education professionals' observed practices and the congruence of these practices with their descriptions of these same practices. Findings inform both practitioners and researchers of education professionals' adherence to procedural requirements, and the congruence between what is observed and described. Practices aligned to federal requirements and congruent to one another show education professionals' procedural efforts to position parents as equal and active participants in the initial eligibility meeting. These positioning practices are important as they collectively inform parents of their role and status as an equal IEP team member with decision-making rights. Ultimately, the results could lead to updated procedures within the special education discipline and more training for education professionals associated with special education processes.

Organization of the Study

    This dissertation has four additional chapters. Chapter two reviews the research literature's exploration of special education eligibility decision-making. This review includes the chronology of special education law, parents' perceptions of initial eligibility meetings, and team decision-making's origin and outcomes in initial eligibility meetings. Next, this study's conceptual framework is established. Chapter three provides and justifies this research study's multiple-method exploratory design. Chapter four presents the research findings. Chapter five summarizes and interprets the results' implications before providing heuristic recommendations for professional practice and research.

Chapter 2

Historic Context and Literature Review

Chapter two reviews team decision-making in the special education literature and then establishes this study's conceptual framework. Four aspects of team decision-making are examined. The first aspect traces judicial rulings and legislative acts that have shaped and guided team decision-making in special education. The second aspect explains the current eligibility decision-making process. The third aspect explores the significance of the involvement of parents in their children's eligibility meetings. The fourth aspect studies parents' perceptions of the IEP process and educational professionals' practices.

Judicial Rulings and Legislative Acts

Early public education served the majority and excluded the minority (Itkonen, 2007; Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996; Morgan, 2005). During the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, children with disabilities were not educated in the American public school system (Bursztyn, 2007; Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001; Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996; Morgan, 2005). Intense parental advocacy, decisive judicial rulings, and research-supported legislative acts changed that policy (Itkonen, 2007; Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). The following chronicles that transition.

Judicial Rulings

The judicial anti-discrimination precedent, which led to legislative acts prohibiting special education discrimination, was the Supreme Court ruling *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954). This ruling prohibited educational discrimination

based on race. The succeeding anti-discriminatory, educational Supreme Court ruling, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971), prohibited public schools from excluding children with mental retardation. One year later, the *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972) ruling established the responsibility of state and local education agencies to educate children with serious emotional disturbances and behavioral problems. By designating discriminatory practices in public- education settings unconstitutional, these Supreme Court rulings have ensured that all children are entitled to a public education.

Legislative Acts

Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975.

Building on the Supreme Court's landmark anti-discriminatory ruling, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975), which was the first federal legislative ruling, declared that all school-age children, regardless of disability type or severity, were entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). The EAHCA (1975) also provided the parents of children with disabilities the right to actively participate in their children's education (Rock, 2000; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988).

Initially, special education decisions were not team-based. In the early years, the eligibility decision was made solely by the disability-specific assessment specialist (Huebner & Gould, 1991; Maher, 1986). For instance, speech-language pathologists determined eligibility for speech and language impairments, psychologists for intellectually- and academically-related disabilities, audiologists for hearing impairments

and deafness, and low vision specialists for visual impairments and blindness. Once eligibility was established, programming and placement decisions were made by a student's special education service providers (e.g., special education teachers and speech-language pathologists).

As parent advocacy groups lobbied for specificity regarding parents' participatory rights, the EAHCA (1975) underwent important revisions. The first major revision occurred in 1990 and the second in 1997. With these revisions, EAHCA (1975) was renamed the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990* and *1997,* respectively.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 and 1997. A major shift with the IDEA (1990) reauthorization was the emphasis on the IEP process being team-based. IDEA (1990) obligated education professionals to actively involve parents as *equal partners* in the IEP process, including decisions involving eligibility or ineligibility, and in programming and placement if children are determined eligible (Huefner, 2000; Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001; Rock, 2000; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988).

The next reauthorization, IDEA (1997), provided parents with an even more meaningful role in the education of their children by maintaining an *equal partnership* between schools and families. This partnership was achieved by requiring parents' participation in IEP decision-making— specifically, evaluation, eligibility, programming, and placement decisions (Huefner, 2000; Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001; Rock, 2000; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004.*Seven years later, IDEA (1997) was amended as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA, 2004). This amendment emphasized instructional accountability. Special education teachers were required to use scientifically-based instructional methods when teaching academic and behavioral skills to students with disabilities (Crockett & Yell, 2008; Malone & Gallagher, 2010). IDEA also required that all special education teachers routinely collect objective data to monitor each student's progress toward IEP goals. Teachers would then submit this data to the student's parents so parents could monitor their child's progress. If data did not show student learning, the teacher could make instructional changes, using scientifically-based instructional methods, and then collect data to determine if the instructional changes are working (Crockett & Yell, 2008; Malone & Gallagher, 2010).

If parents are dissatisfied with procedural and/or substantive issues regarding their child's IEP, IDEA (2004), consistent with instructional accountability, provides parents the means to seek legal support through due process and, if needed, civil litigation. "Procedural requirements compel schools to follow the law, and include such things as involving the student's parent in education decision-making, conducting complete and individualized evaluations, and determining placement. Substantive requirements refer to the content of the IEP and compel schools to provide an education that confers meaningful educational benefit to a student" (Drasgow, Yell, & Robinson, 2001, p. 359).

Thus, the IEP process is more than procedural compliance; it includes attention to program quality (e.g., substantive compliance). With increasing accountability requirements, parents and education professionals must collaboratively develop educational programs that are meaningfully appropriate, legally sound, and grounded in evidenced-based practices producing results indicating improvement in disabled children's lives.

This historical chronology of judicial rulings and legislative acts highlights the evolution of team decision-making in special education with an emphasis on (a) children with special needs having legal access to a meaningful and appropriate education based on their needs in the least restrictive environment, and (b) parents of disabled children being active and meaningful partners in their child's schooling.

Current Components of Eligibility Decision Making

While IDEA (2004) provides the description for an eligible child with a disability, each state determines criteria for the child to be identified as having a disability (Garda, 2004). At the initial eligibility IEP team meeting, the child's evaluative content is compared to the predetermined criteria characterizing each educational disability. The criteria are "that the child is of qualifying age and (1) has an enumerated disability, (2) the disability adversely affects educational performance, and (3) by reason thereof the child needs special education" (Garda, 2004, p.459). The first eligibility component, an enumerated disability, specifies that the child's presenting issues could be described by at least one of 13 specified descriptors: autism, deaf-blindness, health impairment, hearing impairment (including deafness), intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, serious

emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment (including blindness), or multiple disabilities (IDEA 2004, Subpart A--General, §300.8).

The second eligibility component, the disability adversely affects educational performance, is less defined and frequently contested by parents. The courts become involved because "IDEA does not inform the IEP team decision-makers as to which problems are educationally relevant and qualify and which are non-educational and do not qualify, [hence,] leaving the term 'adversely affects educational performance as undefined'" (Garda, 2004, p. 460). For instance, poor academic achievement is readily recognized as an educationally-relevant problem. Disagreement is more likely to occur with non-academic skill sets. The following examples illustrate how the term "adversely affects educational-performance" (Garda, 2004, p. 460) provides a breeding ground for disagreement when non-academic skills are the identified area of deficit. For example, a student with autism may experience significant social deficits, yet exhibit average to above-average cognitive ability, language scores, and academic skills. Likewise, a student with physical impairment may be non-ambulatory, yet be academically capable. Similarly, students may produce passing classroom work, but due to the nature of their 'invisible' issue; such as, a traumatic brain injury, a psychiatric disorder, or history of drug-exposure in utero, may experience social, emotional, and/or behavioral issues (Garda, 2004; Rock & Bateman, 2009). Thus, educational performance is more than academics.

The third eligibility component, a child needs special education, also "contains no explicit guidelines for determining whether a student with impairment needs special education" (Garda, 2004, p. 491). Because no definition exists for needing special education, disagreement between parents and education professionals often occurs (Garda, 2004). A few states have defined, needs special education. For instance, Massachusetts defines needs as the inability to progress effectively in a regular education program; Colorado defines needs as the inability to receive reasonable benefit from ordinary education; and Tennessee defines needs as the inability to be educated appropriately in the general education program. While these three states have proffered definitions, court dockets in these states still contain litigious cases focusing on the subjectivity of such terms as progressing effectively, receiving reasonable benefit, and being educated appropriately (Garda, 2004).

The initial eligibility meeting's purpose is to determine, as a team, whether a student meets the special education eligibility criteria. The team must (a) review the student's evaluation results; (b) compare the results to the state's disability standards to determine whether an educationally-related disability is evidenced; and (c) jointly discuss whether the educational disability has sufficient impact to warrant special education services. The need for special education services requires that the disability has a negative impact on the student's ability to learn and/or retain information.

A student identified with a disability does not automatically require special education. When a disability exists and it negatively affects student learning, the student is eligible for special education services. Conversely, if a disability exists, but it does not

affect student learning, the student is ineligible for special education services. For example, a student may have a seizure disorder that can be referenced under the educationally-related disability category of health impairment. However, if the student's ability to learn and retain information is within expectancy of the child's age or grade, then special education services are not warranted. Presumably, the last two qualifying criteria, adversely affects and needs special education, are less defined; therefore, educators and parents are at liberty to engage and process, as a team, what is in the child's best interest. The research driving legislative efforts for parental involvement in IEP team decision-making is discussed below.

Parental Involvement's Positive Effects

Extensive research supports parental involvement. Pfeiffer's (1980, 1981) studies revealed that a multidisciplinary team approach, including parents and education professionals, could include greater decision-making accuracy and increase the likelihood of expanded services and involvement (Malone & Gallagher, 2010; Pfeiffer, 1980). Pruitt, Wandry, and Hollums (1998) asserted that parents possess essential insights into their children; therefore, parents need to have an active and equitable role during IEP meetings to include successful educational programming and placement decisions. Rock (2000) likened parent participation in the IEP process to a checks-and-balances system. When parents actively participate in the development of their child's IEP, the educational goals are more likely to be individually appropriate. Furthermore, parents who are familiar with the IEP goals are more likely to monitor goal attainment, thus increasing education professionals' accountability. Cho and Gannotti (2005) emphasized that

positive parental involvement, especially early on, is a key factor in a child's success. Nowell and Salem (2007) emphasized that "protecting and developing positive collaborative relationships between parents and schools has empirically been found to be a key element in the success of special education programs, leading to improved educational and social outcomes for children and families" (p. 304). According to Goepel (2009), "the work of professionals can be more effective when parents are involved. [Therefore,]…parents should be seen as partners in their child's education and . . . their views should be taken into account" (p. 127). In Malone and Gallagher's (2010) literature review, a number of positive effects of teamwork, with parental involvement, are noted, such as increased communication, problem-solving, role clarity and balance, monitoring and evaluation, time and resource management, and access to people and resources.

Few researchers would challenge the benefits team decision-making provides for the student, parents, or education professionals. The research literature is replete with evidence-based practices supporting education professionals, as required by law, to actively engage parents in special education decision-making processes, including the eligibility determination (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Malone & Gallagher, 2010; Rock, 2000). Parent advocacy literature brims with recommendations for active parental participation in children's special education processes (Fish, 2006; Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001; Nowell & Salem, 2007; Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Stoner et al., 2005).

Regardless of the known benefits, parental involvement in team decision-making continues to be problematic as evidenced in court dockets and educational research

(Garda, 2004; Malone & Gallagher, 2010). To explore this problem, literature regarding parents' perceptions of initial IEP team meetings is examined below.

Parents' Perceptions and Roles in the Initial IEP Team Meetings

Parents' perceptions of initial IEP team meetings can significantly affect future team interactions and their effectiveness (Cho and Gannotti, 2005; Salas, 2004; Valle & Aponte, 2002; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988). As a result, much research has focused on the parents' perspective.

Garriott, Wandry, and Snyder (2000) interviewed 84 parents who had children receiving special education services in public schools. From this inquiry, vulnerability was exposed. Parents did not feel they were treated as equal, respected members of the IEP team; because the IEP was written prior to the initial team meeting, their input was not incorporated. Parents expressed feeling "devalued, disrespected and ostracized" (Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, p. 11). Positioned as subservient, parents were subjected to professionals' assuming dominant authority (Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder).

Stoner et al. (2005) interviewed four sets of parents who had young children with autism. Parents described school personnel's resistance about obtaining necessary services, such as classroom placement, assistance in the classroom, extended school year services, and speech-language services. Parents believed their persistent efforts for securing specific services were adequate and necessary. When their efforts did not yield what they expected, the parents felt rebuffed or dismissed by "the experts" in the education system Thus, parents' trust in the system rapidly declined. All parents in this study described their initial IEP team meeting as confusing and complicated.

Fish (2006) interviewed parents who had at least one child diagnosed with autism and received special education services. Of the seven parents in this study, all noted initial resistance from the education professionals regarding their child's private diagnosis of autism. The education professionals' initial resistance of incoming diagnostic information negatively affected parents' and education professionals' collaborative efforts during the initial IEP team meetings.

Fish (2008) continued investigating parents' perceptions of IEP meetings by surveying the parents of 51 school-age children. All the students "were receiving special education services from one family support service agency whose purpose was to provide services to students with special needs and their family members" (p. 9). Parents' responses revealed

> (a) the importance for educators to build positive relationships with parents during IEP meetings, (b) the necessity for educators to treat parents as equals during the IEP meetings, (c) the importance for educators to provide parents with an equal voice in the IEP meeting process, (d) the necessity for educators to value parents as equal partners, and (e) educators should encourage parents' input, working cooperatively together. (p. 13)

These findings suggest parents not only desire active participation in their child's IEP, but also want their participation and input to be respected and valued.

Esquivel, Ryan, and Bonner (2008) also revealed parents' desire for more meaningful parent participation. These researchers surveyed parents regarding their perceptions of experiences in school-based team meetings. The study's purpose was to

identify characteristics of team meetings that may include meaningful parent participation. Parent participants were current or past members of the school district's special education advisory committee and had at least one school-age child receiving special education services in an elementary, middle, or high school within their Midwestern metropolitan school district. Characteristics identified as promoting meaningful parent participation were grouped into five categories:

(a) meeting context and organization (i.e., meeting size, purpose of meeting, facilitation and organization, and clearly stated conclusions);

(b) relationships among team members and with the child;

(c) communication (i.e., open to parent suggestions, honest dialogue, professionals' quality of participation);

(d) problem-solving (flexible, creative, knowledgeable, articulated outcomes); and

(e) parents' emotions (i.e., is meeting site safe to express emotions of fear, frustration, can team members agree to disagree and continue with the meeting). (pp. 250-251)

Decades of research show active parental participation is significant. According to the *Federal Register of EAHCA* (1977), "Parents' participatory roles were increased and redefined to include serving as active and equal team members during the special education placement conference and the IEP meeting" (as cited in Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988, p. 82). Parent participation was also emphasized in Feinberg and Vacca (2000): "families should not simply be expected to comply…but should actively participate in decision-making" (p. 133). Cho and Gannotti (2005) reported, "The parents

wanted to be informed about services in order to choose the services most suitable to the needs of their children" (p. 1). A surfeit of empirical evidence confirms that when parents are not actively involved in their children's special education programming, students are affected and the parent and education professional relationships rapidly deteriorate (Canary, 2008). The following studies addressed student-related issues when parents were not active participants in their children's special education programming. Those students may (a) be objectified as a disability rather than respected as a child (Pruitt, Wandry, & Hollums, 1998; Vehkakoski, 2008); (b) have difficulty obtaining services or experience inadequate service delivery (Stoner et al., 2005); and (c) experience residual effects of the adults' frustrations in how they are treated (Salas, 2004; Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003).

Relationships between parents and education professionals have significant consequences, including the following:

(a) breakdowns in communication (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Feinberg & Vacca, 2000; Goepel, 2009; Kohler, 1999; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Malone & Gallagher, 2010);

(b) erosion of trust, an essential building block for the long-term and interdependent relationship between home and school (Malone & Gallagher, 2010; Stoner & Angell, 2006);

(c) fragmented or nonexistent partnerships between the parents and the school system (Malone & Gallagher, 2010; Nicholson, Evans, & Tellier-Robinson, 2001; Salas, 2004);

(d) lack of familial responsivity to integrate interventions at home that are being used

at school (Canary, 2008; Valle & Aponte, 2002); and

(e) an increase in negative emotions and adversarial relations between parents and

education professionals (Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Salas, 2004; Stoner et al., 2005;

Valle & Aponte, 2002).

Education Professionals' Practices

Despite education professionals' mandated charge to actively involve parents in

the IEP process, "…schools continue to resist accepting parents as full partners" (Hess,

Molina, & Kozleski, 2006, p. 148). This resistance is reiterated in Rock and Bateman

(2009): "many school officials do not comply with the IDEA (2004) mandate for shared

decision-making" (p. 56). According to an initial study of educators' practices, parental

participation in IEP meetings was structured such that the input and perspectives of

parents were delegitimized by minimizing and/or rejecting their contributions. These

results were particularly evident with culturally and linguistically different families

(Allen, Harry, & McLaughlin, 1995; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Salas, 2004). In turn, parents

felt disempowered and disrespected; thus, over time, parents expressed resentment and no

longer participated (Allen, Harry, & McLaughlin, 1995; Cho & Gannotti, 2005; Salas,

2004).

Since establishing and maintaining decision-making equity in IEP meetings are

critical for student success, a number of studies have examined discursive practices

during IEP meetings (Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Harris, 2010; Morgan, 2005;

Rock, 2000; Rogers, 2002; Valle & Aponte, 2002; Vehkakoski, 2008). The school district

is legally responsible for fully involving parents in developing their child's IEP (Drasgow, Yell, & Robinson, 2001). Despite the legal requirements for education professionals' involving parents in the IEP process, studies have exposed education professionals using discursive efforts to deter parents' participation (Fish, 2006; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Mehan, 1983; Morgan, 2005; Rogers, 2002, 2003; Vehkakoski, 2008). This stark incongruity between the legal requirement for education professionals to encourage parental involvement and the actual practice of discouraging parental involvement underscores the need for reform.

In one of the earliest studies to highlight disparity between the law and the reality of IEP team practices, Mehan (1983) noted that while "decision-making" implied discussion and negotiation, the experts presented decisions with an air of institutional authority. The professionals' language and reports contained obscure professional language and highly technical vocabulary. Thus, the education professionals were irrefutably the team's decision-making members. According to Mehan, educators' institutional reporting contributed to a discourse of persuasion; that is, "decisions [were] *presented* to the committee by the school psychologist without question or challenge by other members of the committee, including parents" (p. 195). Lay members were subsequently "induced to agree with school policy, and come to agreement in a relatively smooth and trouble-free way" (p. 188). No negotiation or co-construction of understanding occurred among the parties; rather, the decision-making was essentially obliged "by the institutionalized trappings of the meeting and the language used in the meeting" (p. 207), thereby separating rather than encouraging team decision-making.

Moecker (1989) used the Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) framework to examine individual and interpersonal dynamics of special education placement committee members. The individual decision-making processes of experienced professionals were analyzed when the referral concern was bilingualism. Specifically analyzed were the professionals' knowledge-base, reasoning, and communication patterns. A mismatch, or incongruency, was noted between espoused beliefs of individual team members and their actual behaviors. Concerns were expressed when children were identified first as bilingual and secondarily as educationally disabled. This mismatch was noted as a potential explanation for ethnic over-representation in special education.

Rock (2000) also found that instead of parents and education professionals jointly making educational decisions, the education professionals were self-delegating their role as active decision makers and regulated parents as passive consent givers. Active decision makers' self-delegation was evidenced by "menu-driven district approaches" and "teachers know best" mindsets (p. 2). Perceived inequity during the IEP team meeting was further confirmed in Valle and Aponte's lived experience (Valle & Aponte, 2002). Aponte, a mother of a student with special needs, shares her experiences when teachers and school staff made the educational decisions and they, in turn, simply expected the parent(s) to consent.

Despite mandates for equitable decision-making in IEP meetings, mandates have not necessarily fostered equity (Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Moecker, 1989; Morgan, 2005; Rock, 2000; Salas, 2004; Valle & Aponte, 2002; Vehkakoski, 2008). In some situations, the opposite has occurred; education professionals have produced

obstacles that hinder parents' active participation. For example, parents were not always fully informed of their right to actively participate in their child's educational programming (Gilliam, 1979; Pfeiffer, 1980; Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988). In Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, and Lasky's (1988) study, parents were asked, "In terms of your child's [special] educational program, what do you think the school wants from you?" (p.88). None of the parents "responded with a comment that indicated active involvement in the IEP process" (p. 88). Nearly 20% of the parents claimed they simply did not know they were expected or could have been actively involved during the IEP meeting (Vaughn, Bos, Harrell, & Lasky, 1988).

Education professionals are not entirely responsible for the disconnect in initial IEP meetings. However, new special education training approaches are now being offered to educators. Patterson, Webb, and Krudwig (2009) explored one teacher-preparation program that implemented a new methodology for IEP-related instruction for pre-service special education teachers. In an effort to provide pre-service teachers with authentic IEP training, they were given opportunities to apply IEP-related instruction as they participated in IEP meetings with parents of students with disabilities. Some of these authentic interactions with parents during IEP meetings reinforced beliefs about positive teacher-parent partnerships; however, other of these interactions weakened beliefs that the partnerships were supportive. Program evaluators concluded, "Training teachers who can effectively collaborate with families will not only support teacher resiliency, it will ultimately result in positive student outcomes" (p. 48).

In several states, aspiring administrators enrolled in K-12 administrative licensure programs are not required to take special education course work (Collins & White, 2001; Davidson & Algozzine, 2002; Davidson & Gooden, 2001; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006). However, principals are ultimately responsible for complying with federal and state laws and with policies and regulations, including those associated with IDEA, 2004. Whole-school effectiveness requires knowledgeable and competent leadership, including responsible decision-making for students with special needs. Yet, "few states have [or require] special education competence, knowledge, or coursework for administrators" (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000, p.17). According to Davidson and Gooden (2001), "Lack of knowledge of such laws and the understanding to properly implement them at the school level can result in costly litigation" (p. 42). Due to the intricacies of special education services and regulations, most principals state they feel inept to handle this role. Pre-service elementary and secondary school administrators "not only perceive themselves to have a limited level of knowledge of special education law, but believe their level of understanding to be even more limited" (Davidson & Gooden, 2001, p.48). Between administrators' lack of both knowledge and confidence regarding special education law, policies, and procedures, school districts and preparatory programs must train administrators. Additionally, administrators must address their skill deficits to more readily and competently include complying with the IDEA 2004's provisions.

Ford, Pugach, and Otis-Wilborn (2001) describe their collaborative teacher education program for general and special education pre-service teachers. The dual-

system approach prepares all pre-service teachers first as general education teachers; then those wishing to train as special educators take an additional year of coursework and student teacher training. This general education/special education training collaborative is based on the premise that "general education is a constant, the active backdrop against which the practice of differentiated special education occurs" (p. 284). As special education teachers are first trained as general education teachers, this approach is particularly beneficial in the current era of inclusive education. Redefining teacher preparation programs raises program-preparation expectations while refining complementary roles between general education and special education.

Nearly four decades have passed since the collaborative effort for IEP team decision-making was mandated. However, while the research emphasizes "parental involvement is crucial to successful results for students" (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001, p. 330), "the IEP meeting has become a meaningless ritual in which teachers dictate the prescribed educational program and then pass the ceremonial pen to parents to secure their signatures" (Rock, 2000, p. 32). Securing parents' signature on IEP documents has been a primary focus in other studies too (Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011). Sheehey's (2006) study determined that while "collaboration and equal partnership is the theoretical framework for educational decision-making, practice is inconsistent with theory" (p. 13). Research is needed to examine interactions among team members influencing team decision-making in initial eligibility meetings.

In summary, obstacles negatively affecting parents' participation in IEP meetings include the following:

(a) IEP development without parent input (Allen, Harry, & McLaughlin, 1995; Sheehey, 2006);

(b) professional control of meetings (Salas, 2004; Soodak & Erwin, 2000);

(c) education professionals' uncooperative attitude (Sheehey, 2006);

(d) parents' inexperience and lack of knowledge (Salas, 2004; Sheehey, 2006; Soodak & Erwin, 2000);

(e) education professionals' withholding of information, including availability of special education supports and services (Liasidou, 2011; Nicholson, Evans, & Tellier-Robinson, 2001; Sheehey, 2006); and

(f) lack of education professionals' training regarding IEP team meetings (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Frost, Rogers, O'Bryon, & Perry, 2010; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006).

Thus, the practice of team decision-making, essential for successful eligibility and programming decisions, has been omitted or thwarted; breakdowns with the practice of team decision-making must be identified. Thereafter, the reasons for these breakdowns must be addressed. This review now shifts to ontological and epistemic perspectives that segue into this study's conceptual framework, which provided structure for the research questions and methods.

Conceptual Framework

Qualitative research design is founded on the premise that individuals construct reality by interacting in their social worlds (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Thus, what people know is socially constructed. As such, meaning and understanding are not found or discoverable, but constructed by people within the context of their interactions (Argyris & Schön, 1974). The Argyris and Schön (1974) organizational learning theory; that is, theories-of-action, provides the study's conceptual framework for examining the practice of partnered decision-making in the context of initial eligibility meetings. Examining these interactions from the theories-of-action conceptual frame provides opportunity for understanding practices of partnered decision-making in a way that has yet to be explored. Professional effectiveness increases when understanding increases.

Theories-of-Action

Theories-of-Action is the selected conceptual frame to examine education professionals' interactions with parents in the initial eligibility meeting. Theories-of-action provides "…a unit of description for the knowledge that informs action" (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. xxi). Here, the unit of description under examination is the practice of education professionals' positioning parents as decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting. With this said, the theories-of-action frame provides the necessary elements for gathering information and analyzing education professionals' practices of positioning parents as team decision-making partners. The first element, theories-in-use, provides the opening lens for viewing education professionals' actions of behavior; that

is, their professional practice of positioning parents as decision-making partners. The second element, espoused theories, provides the introductory means for obtaining education professionals' descriptions of their actions; that is, the explanation or justification on behalf of their professional practice of positioning parents as decision-making partners. The education professionals' professional practice of positioning parents as decision-making partners is dependent on their knowledge and interpretations of IDEA (2004). After education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) and described practices (espoused theories) are obtained, comparisons are made to determine congruency or incongruency between the two.

The phenomena under review are education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) and their descriptions of practices (espoused theories) regarding the professional practice of positioning of parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting. Education professionals' theories-in-use are their actions and interactions in a particular situation. The espoused theories of professionals are the descriptions of what they do or think they do when asked about a particular situation. When espoused theories are consistent with theories-in-use, the relationship of these two theories is identified as congruent. Conversely, when theories-in-use are not consistent with espoused theories, the relationship of these two theories is identified as incongruent. Few people are aware of their theories-in-use or that their theories-in-use are not always the same as their espoused theories. That incongruency is not uncommon for education professionals. Eraut (2000) explains that dissonance is "a natural consequence of the dualistic approach to professional education because, while espoused theories are

developed, taught, and assessed in formal educational contexts, theories-in-use develop separately as teachers learn to cope with the pressures and demands of practice" (p. 123). This study examined the IDEA (2004) mandate for education professionals to support parents' decision-making involvement in initial eligibility meetings. According to the research, this mandate has extensive benefits. As such, education professionals purportedly support parents' involvement. The ways education professionals' espoused theories support parents as decision-making partners may be expressed as the following: (a) Parents should have an active and equitable role in decisions involving their children; (b) Parents' active participation is research supported and, therefore, best practice; (c) Parents' presence helps to ensure that educators procedurally and substantively make decisions complying with the law; and (d) Parents' input contributes to greater decision-making practices. When educators espouse a particular theory and in turn practice it, alignment or congruence exists between what is said and done.

However, research shows it is not uncommon for education professionals to purport an espoused theory regarding what is mandated, research-supported, and best practice; yet their actions say otherwise. As previously stated, this disconnect between theories-in-use and espoused theories is not uncommon when demands and pressures in the workplace are increasing. Despite what some education professionals espouse regarding the benefits of parents being decision-making partners, the practices of those professionals do not support their espoused theories. The following examples demonstrate justification for parents' reduced involvement: (a) Parents' required presence at IEP team meetings slows the process; (b) Education professionals; should make

students' educational decisions; (c) Education professionals are ultimately responsible for the student's education, namely test scores; hence, the professionals should be responsible for students' education plans; (d) Education professionals should be the active decision makers, and parents should be the passive consent givers; and (e) The "teacher knows best" mindset. When educators espouse one theory, yet practice another, an imbalance or incongruence exists between what is said and done (Eraut, 2000).

Two recent studies show the common incongruency experienced between professionals' practices and the perceptions of those practices. The first study pertains to teachers' disconnect between formal teaching theory and teaching practices while the second study involves a social worker experiencing conflict between her professional and organizational beliefs and practices. In the first study, Harnett (2012) observed and interviewed two seasoned elementary school teachers over two-years. The study's purpose was to explore the effects of the teachers' knowledge, thinking, and beliefs on the ways in which those teachers included students' learning in teacher-student interactions. In-depth analysis revealed discrepancies between what the teachers believed they were doing (espoused theories) and what they were actually doing (theories-in-action). The teachers "…talked about building on prior knowledge, developing understanding, scaffolding student learning, and providing feedback to help students move forward; [however,] their practice was sometimes inconsistent with their stated beliefs" (p. 378).

In the second study, Savaya and Gardner (2012) examined beliefs and practices of community agencies' social workers. One social worker espoused the values of

understanding, empathy, and tolerance, which would translate into being a client-centered advocate honoring nonjudgmental partnerships with her clients. However, for this social worker to conform within the organization and protect herself, her practice (theories-in-use) was oriented to the community agency.

These two studies highlight the type of discrepancy that commonly exists between a person's beliefs or thoughts and actions. As these studies show, the discrepancy is often subtle and unknown unless practitioners know how to compare their espoused theories with their theories-in-use. To compare espoused theories and theories-in-use, the practitioners' use of Argyris and Schön's theories-of-action model, is examined in the following section.

Single-loop and Double-loop Learning Models

Argyris and Schön (1978) propose two learning models, single-loop and double-loop learning; they are distinct, yet interrelated models used to address problems of incongruency. When the ability to get what one wants is challenged or thwarted, single-loop and double-loop learning can detect and correct problems interfering with achieving the desired outcomes.

The single-loop learning model detects and corrects problems at the point where the problem manifested (Argyris, 1997). Single-loop learning is particularly efficient and effective when detecting and correcting a problem that is systematic, technical, and external. The single-loop learning model may be likened to an operational flow chart; that is, once the breakdown point is identified, automated steps are followed without

questioning the cause; without seeking plausible explanations for the breakdown; or without seeking alternative solutions so the breakdown does not reoccur.

Commonly seen in a special education context, single-loop learning is readily noted in this type of example; a parent repeatedly calls to reschedule an initial IEP meeting. Since the district is required to keep a federally mandated timeline, the file is closed and an automated letter is sent to the parents explaining that they must initiate contact to re-open the case. Simple, operational single-loop learning is evidenced in this example: a) The problem was detected; that is, the parent did not attend multiple scheduled meetings; b) The problem was superficially corrected by following the school district's documentation protocol and sending the automated letter informing the parents the file was closed until they re-initiated contact with the district; and c) No effort was made to understand the parents' reasons for not attending scheduled meetings, and (d) alternative solutions were not generated to resolve the problem.

The double-loop learning model also detects and corrects problems, but it seeks to understand what is happening and why. In the single-loop learning example, double-loop learning could have occurred after identifying the parents' rescheduling as a problem. In a double-loop scenario, the problem would not be corrected by rescheduling the meeting. Instead, education professionals would try to understand why the parents were rescheduling the meetings. Once the problem was detected and understood, resolutions could be implemented.

While this individual case could be corrected with the double-loop learning approach, the problem of parental rescheduling is common enough for the district to have

created a systematic rescheduling protocol. Responding to rescheduling with the process removes the threat of punitive federal action but does not address a child's educational challenges. Therefore, rather than automatically responding with the process, education professionals could be encouraged to probe further and generate alternative solutions. This approach could substantively reduce parental attendance problems and help school teams' move toward improving student learning.

Chapter Summary

As special education became the means to educate children with disabilities, judicial rulings and legislative acts were established to ensure that children with disabilities have access to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Despite nearly 40 years of legislative efforts, the literature shows continued disparity between federal mandates affording parents' active and team decision-making rights and what actually occurs in IEP meetings at the local level (Fish, 2006; Fitzgerald & Watkins, 2006; Gallagher, Malone, & Ladner, 2005; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Katsiyannis & Maag, 2001; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Nowell & Salem, 2007). Interfering with the IEP process, these discrepancies negatively affect the special needs children who are supposed to be helped through the process.

This research seeks to (a) utilize Argyris and Schön's (1974) Theories-of-Action lens to detect congruencies and incongruences between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding the positioning of parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting; (b) understand education professionals' espoused theories regarding legally mandated procedural practices for positioning parents

as decision-making partners in initial eligibility IEP meetings; (c) understand education professionals' theories-in-use regarding parents as decision-making partners in initial eligibility IEP meetings; and (d) understand the congruence or incongruence between the education professionals' espoused theories and their theories-in-use. The following chapter provides this research study's methods and procedures.

Chapter 3

Methods

This chapter describes the methodologies used to answer this study's research questions. First provided are the explanation and rationale for selecting an interactive design. Next, the researcher's role is described, followed by the selection processes for the research sites and participants. Then the methods and procedures used to collect and analyze the data are explained. Last explained are the verifying strategies used to support the research findings as credible and confirmable.

Interactive Research Design

Essential to qualitative research is the continuity among the research questions; the conceptual framework; and the methodologies used to collect, analyze, and verify data. Maxwell's (2013) interactive research model with Argyris and Schön's (1974, 1978) theories-of-action conceptual frame was used to build and link relational propositions from the data to the research questions.

Maxwell's (2013) interactive research design is unique from other qualitative designs in its conceptualizing of relationships among its individual components. This design has five integrated components: the study's purpose, the conceptual framework, the research questions, the data-collection methods, and the verification methods. Conceptually mapping this design, the research questions were the center component with the remaining four components positioned as the points of a square (see Figure 1). Components were closely linked bi-directionally. These bidirectional connections provided an interactive and flexible framework.

Component 1
Purpose of the Study
Explore the congruence of education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding the positioning of parents as team decision-making partners in the initial IEP eligibility meeting.

Component 2
Conceptual Framework
Theories of Action:

Theories-in-Use

Espoused Theories

Component 3
Research Inquiries

1. How do education professionals position parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting?

2. How do education professionals position parents as team decision-making partners during the initial eligibility meeting?

3. *What is the relationship between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting?*

Component 4
Data-collection Methods
Document

Observations

Questionnaires

Interviews

Component 5
Verification Methods
Recursive Review of Data

Triangulation of Data Methods

Multiple Analyzing Strategies

Audit Trail

Figure 1. Interactive Research Design[1]

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[1] From *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach, 3rd Edition* (p. 5), by J. A. Maxwell, 2013, Los Angeles: Sage Publications. Copyright (2013) by J. A. Maxwell. Adapted with permission.

This interactive research design, as with all qualitative research, required an ongoing reflexive process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Maxwell, 2013) involving the conceptual components (e.g., goals and conceptual framework) with the operational components (e.g., data-collection methods and verification methods). All five components were reviewed simultaneously, allowing new developments or component adjustment due to effects one component has on another (Maxwell, 2013). This flexible interactive approach exemplified this design as a "design-in-use" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 3).

Component one: purpose of the study

This study's purpose was to explore the congruence of education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding the positioning of parents as team decision-making partners in the initial IEP eligibility meeting. Special education eligibility decision-making occurs during initial eligibility meetings. When establishing a student's eligibility for special education, team decision-making is federally mandated because educational research has purported it as a best practice. Ongoing reviews of this process are merited to further substantiate or readdress this best-practice claim.

Component two: conceptual framework

Argyris and Schön's (1974) theories-of-action was the conceptual frame for examining the education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories related to the positioning of parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting. Theories-in-use was the lens for viewing education professionals' observed practices; espoused theories, was the means for eliciting education professionals' descriptions of practices. Thereafter, comparisons for similarity were made between the

two practices. When similarity was indicated, the relationship between the two theories was defined as congruent.

Component three: research questions

Education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) were monitored for occurrences of positioning parents as team decision-making partners. Education professionals' descriptions of practices (espoused theories) were elicited regarding positioning parents as team decision-making partners. The two practices were compared; the more similar the practices, the more congruent the relationship between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories. With congruence, outcomes are more inclined to be effective and satisfying. As the IEP team's decision-making success relies on the education professionals' practices, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do education professionals position parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting?

2. How do education professionals describe positioning parents as team decision-making partners during the initial eligibility meeting?

3. What is the relationship between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding parents as decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting?

Component four: data-collection methods

This study used multiple-methods data-collection. Data was collected from four sources: (a) IEP meeting-notification document, (b) firsthand observations within the

context of initial IEP eligibility meetings, (c) a secure on-line questionnaire electronically mailed after the initial IEP meeting to the education professionals serving as research participants , and (d) semi-structured interviews with the education professionals who participated in these meetings. As indicated in Maxwell (2013), using multiple methods was multi-purposeful. First, use of different methods substantiated one method in relation to another to determine if all methods supported a single conclusion. Second, a multiple-methods approach broadened the research scope, obtaining different aspects of the phenomena studied. Third, this approach intensified the research by delving deeper into the data.

The data-collection methods, analysis strategies, and findings were integrated to achieve an interactive whole. Integrating multiple approaches required revisiting the data sources and the design components as the study progressed. Revisiting components provided a means for reflecting on and evaluating the implications of the components and their relation to the whole.

Component five: verification methods

The verification methods tested the research conclusions' validity and potential threats to those conclusions. Data was obtained from multiple sources. Triangulation verified each set of data with at least one other data source. Multiple analysis strategies were implemented to deepen and strengthen the findings. An audit trail is available for further verification.

This interactive research design was exploratory (Ogawa & Melan, 1991) and instrumental (Stake, 2008). As stated in Ogawa and Melan, an exploratory design is a

sound and sensible first step when the topic of interest has not been the subject of extensive empirical examination. Because little is known about espoused theories of education professionals relative to their actual practices of positioning parents as team decision-making partners in initial IEP meetings, this study was exploratory. This study's findings can contribute to the research literature and professional practices involving team decision-making and special education practices.

My Role as the Researcher

A doctoral student majoring in Educational Psychology and Research with a specialization in Collaborative Learning, I was the primary researcher, who posed the research questions, selected the research sites, solicited the participants, and determined the data-collection methods. I also gained access to meetings containing sensitive information by negotiating with initial contact persons (school district superintendents); education professionals (LEA representatives, special education teachers, and school psychologists) under study; and parents of children being considered for special education.

Unique to my role as the researcher was the fact that as a practicing school psychologist, I routinely participate in initial IEP eligibility meetings. Thus, I am an experienced insider knowledgeable of the general context of and the processes occurring in initial IEP meetings. I did not conduct research in the school district of my employment because the duality of researcher and practitioner can have assumed biases. As a non-participant observer with insider knowledge, I was conscious of my role as an outside researcher observing and documenting what was in the *here and now* versus an

inside practitioner documenting what I thought should or should not be occurring (Patton, 1990). Multiple data sources and multiple analyzing strategies were used to reduce biases and to eliminate threats to my interpretations and explanations.

Site Selection

Site selection began with purposeful selection (Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990) of twelve public school districts within a 30-mile radius known to be involved with the researching university. The director of each of these school districts received a letter via electronic mail introducing the study's general purpose, followed by a request for further discussion of the study's purpose and parameters (see Appendix A). Once the director of schools granted permission for the study to take place, the principals of the elementary schools were sent letters requesting permission to conduct research in their schools (see Appendix B). Seven school districts indicated interest. Upon IRB approval (See Appendix C), the seven districts and the respective LEA representatives gave me permission to pursue data collection in their elementary schools. While multiple districts and schools agreed to participate, schedules and timeline constraints limited data collection to three school districts. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, eight schools with three education professionals per site participated; hence, data was obtained from eight observations, 24 questionnaires, and 24 interviews.

Participant Selection

Education professionals. According to the *Federal Register* (2006), the descriptive requirements for IEP education professionals required to attend each IEP meeting include the following: (a) at least one of the child's general education teachers or

one adequately credentialed to teach the child's general education curriculum; (b) at least

one of the child's special education teachers or at least a provider of special education

Table 1. Participating Districts and Schools

District	School	District-School
A	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6
B	1	B-1
C	1	C-1

Table 2. District, School, and Education Professionals

District-School	Education Professional
A-1	Special Educator, Psychologist, Principal
A-2	Special Educator, Psychologist, Assistant Principal
A-3	Special Educator, Psychologist, Assistant Principal
A-4	Special Educator, Psychologist, Assistant Principal
A-5	Special Educator, Psychologist, Assistant Principal
A-6	Special Educator, Psychologist, Assistant Principal
B-1	Special Educator, Psychologist, Assistant Principal
C-1	Special Educator, Psychologist, Assistant Principal

services; (c) a professional with knowledge or expertise who can interpret the evaluation results' instructional implications; and (d) an LEA representative. In this study, the school psychologist was the education professional who interpreted the evaluation results. The *Federal Register* specifies the LEA representative must be (a) qualified to provide or supervise specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities; (b) knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and (c) knowledgeable about the availability of the LEA's resources.

Once district and school permission was obtained, the education professionals scheduled to attend the IEP meetings received an electronic introduction. My doctoral status in educational psychology and my focus on interactions during initial eligibility meetings were explained. The participants were also informed that the following would occur: (a) the copy of the IEP meeting-notification document maintained in the student's file would be reviewed, (b) the IEP meetings would be observed, (c) written responses to an on-line questionnaire seeking their perspectives on specific features of IEP team meetings would be requested, and (d) an interview with each of them would be requested. The participants were also informed the interviews would be tape-recorded and transcribed. Finally, they were advised that considerations of the meeting notification, my observation notes, their questionnaire responses to the questionnaire, and portions of their interviews would be combined and referenced for my analysis.

Essential for authenticity was my candidness with the potential participants. I informed them that expressing their views potentially placed them in a position of perceived vulnerability. I assured participants that their name would be removed from all

data sources and that comments and interpretive findings would not link them to their
school or district. Protecting anonymity was essential to encourage participants' candid
responses. While I assured all education professionals that I would maintain their
confidentiality and anonymity, I could not guarantee others' would. In return for his or
her time and candor, each education professional received a twenty-dollar gift card. Prior
to data collection, written consent was obtained from each of the participating education
professionals (Appendix D).

Parents. At least one parent or legal guardian is required to be present for an
initial eligibility team to convene. While parents were not research participants, they did
participate in the initial IEP team meetings; therefore, I was not required to obtain their
written consent for my presence. However, as an outsider to this educational setting, I
sought and obtained verbal consent to be present during their child's eligibility meeting.

Methods and Procedures

Based on my review of IDEA 2004, the *Federal Register* (2006), and the research
literature, the following criteria became my reference for the education professionals'
theories-in-use and espoused theories of parents as team decision-making partners: (a)
The initial eligibility meeting's purpose was indicated on the parents' meeting-
notification document; (b) Parents' role as IEP team decision-making members was
verbally indicated during the IEP meeting; and (c) The educational impact of the child's
identified disability was the subject of joint discussion, which included whether the child
required instructional support and/or services *more than* and *different than* what could be
accomplished in the general education setting (IDEA, 2004). Furthermore, the final

eligibility report, suggesting or negating special education services, is completed after rather than before this joint discussion. Completing the eligibility report prior to the discussion signified that education professionals predetermined the child's eligibility/ineligibility status without parental input; such predetermination contradicts best practice and is against the law. When complying with the above-mentioned IDEA (2004) requirements, the education professionals demonstrated the theories-in-use under examination (i.e., positioning parents as team decision-making partners). When describing the above-mentioned IDEA (2004) requirements, the education professionals described the espoused theories under examination (i.e., descriptions of positioning parents as team decision-making partners).

Data collection began with a review of the IEP meeting-notification document maintained in the student's school file, followed by my observation of the initial eligibility meeting. The notification document and observations provided data regarding the education professionals' theories-in-use. Next, written input was obtained through an on-line questionnaire, which was designed to elicit the professionals' descriptions of what occurred in the eligibility meeting. Lastly, semi-structured interviews were completed with each professional; the same queries in the questionnaire were used in the interview. However, the semi-structured interview also provided opportunity to ask follow-up questions for additional information and to seek clarification. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed.

The four data-collection methods were coordinated so the data collected in various forms could be recursively reviewed, verified, and systematically integrated

(Table 3). The findings and conclusions were categorized in response to the study's research questions.

Meeting-Notification Document. According to IDEA 2004, parents must be informed of the purpose(s) of IEP meetings. Consistent with the *Federal Register of IDEA* (2006), a member of the IEP team must provide parents with written notification of the upcoming meeting. According to the *Federal Register,* "The meeting notice must indicate the purpose, time, and location of the meeting and who will be in attendance" (p. 1461). This notification is sent according to each local school's procedures with usually one designated education professional responsible for sending the notice. For the purposes of this study, when the designated professional sent the IEP meeting notification document to the parents, credit was given to all professionals and IEP teams. Once the document is sent, a copy must be maintained in the student's school file. As the researcher, I verified this document was completed and sent in accordance to the *Federal Register* (2006) by reviewing a copy of it in the student's file and documenting its accuracy on the Meeting Observation Form (Appendix H).

Observations. The research participants were observed during naturally-occurring initial IEP meetings. Naturally-occurring meetings were meetings that occurred whether this study was being conducted or not. Natural observations are an explicit and meaningful way to learn about people's behaviors, particularly within the context in which these behaviors occur (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 1990). Observations provide a means "for

Table 3. Matrix of Research Inquiries and Data Collection Instruments

Research Questions	Document	Observation	Questionnaire	Interview
RQ#1: How do education professionals position parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting? (*Theories-in-Use*)	X	X		
RQ#2: How do education professionals describe their positioning of parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting? (*Espoused Theories*)			X	X
RQ#3: What is the relationship between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding parents as decision-making partners in initial eligibility meetings? (*Congruence/Incongruence*)	X	X	X	X

getting at tacit understandings and theories-in-use, as well as aspects for the participants'

perspective that they are reluctant to directly state in interviews" (Maxwell, 2013, p.

103). Direct observations also minimize any preconceived notions of the phenomenon

being investigated.

Fundamental to this research design was the documentation of what was seen and

heard within the delimited domain of initial IEP meetings. Due to my insider knowledge

of the legality and sensitivity of tape-recording IEP team meetings, meetings were not

taped. As such, my field notes were an approximation rather than a verbatim scripting of

the participants' interactions. In my effort to systematically examine features relative to

my research questions, an observation form based on the literature and my own

experience as a school psychologist was developed (Appendix H).

Questionnaire. At the close of each IEP meeting, the education professionals were

reminded to respond to the on-line questionnaire accessible through a link embedded

within their school-based electronic mail. The time required to complete the

questionnaire depended on each person's amount of thought devoted to the questions.

Requested information was developed from the literature and my own experiences to

elicit the education professionals' espoused theories regarding parents as team decision-

making partners in initial eligibility meetings. A copy of the questionnaire protocol is

located in Appendix I.

Semi-structured interviews. Approximately one week after the eligibility meeting, the

education professionals were interviewed. The questions in the semi-structured

interviews were the same as the questions on the questionnaire. The interview protocol

organized the primary interview questions so it was efficient, systematic and focused (Appendix J). Additional querying prompts were used at the discretion of the researcher, to obtain additional information, particularly when participants' responses were limited. All questions and responses were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Shown in Table 4 is the relationship between the theories-of-action conceptual framework, the three research questions, and four data-collection methods. The table's last column identifies the data-collection methods. The numbers correspond to the number on each respective form seeking education professionals' information. The meeting notification document, D, does not have its own form; instead, information regarding the document is found on statement one of the observation form.

Data Analysis

The purpose of analysis was to bring order, structure and meaning to the data (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). The systematic analysis process was ongoing, recursive, and dynamic in order to ascertain the answers to the study's research questions. The process began with recursive readings of the data. Maxwell's (2013) similarity relations analyzing strategy, was used to code and categorize sets of data. Analyzing strategies also included a variation of reflection-on-action (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Schön, 1983) and analytic memo-writing (Clarke, 2005). Collectively, these data-analyzing strategies resulted in tallies and frequency counts; in turn, summative data lead to interpretive analysis.

Table 4. Relationship between Conceptual Framework, Research Questions and Data-Collection Instruments

Theories-of-Action	*Research Questions*	*Document (D) Observation (O) Questionnaire (Q) Interview (I)*
Theories-in-Use (*Observed Practice*)	RQ#1: How do education professionals position parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting?	D/O: 1 O: 2, 3, 4, 5
Espoused Theories (*Described Practice*)	RQ#2: How do education professionals describe positioning of parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting?	Q: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 I: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Theories-of-Action *(Congruence/Incongruence)*	RQ#3: What is the relationship between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories of parents as decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting?	D/O: 1 O: 2, 3, 4, 5 Q: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 I: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

Recursive readings. The initial analyzing strategy involved recursively reading observation forms and associated field notes, reading the participants' responses to the questionnaire, and listening to the interview tapes in conjunction with the transcriptions. During the reading and listening, notes were taken about what was seen and heard with these data sources. This systematic and ongoing process of reading and note taking was the organizing structure used for coding and categorizing data relative to the criteria for parents as team decision-making partners.

Similarity relations: coding and categorizing. Maxwell's (2013) strategy of similarity relations provided the coding and categorization strategy used in the study. The similarity relations strategy began with comparing and contrasting the data. The similarity categorization characterized the content of what was done (theories-in-use) and what was said to have occurred (espoused theories) relative to the study's criteria set for positioning parents as team decision-making partners.

Analytic memos. Memo writing was an analysis strategy to document the researcher's thoughts and suggestions about the data. Memos are "sites of conversation with ourselves about our data" (Clarke, 2005, p. 202). Memos were written during the observations, while reading the participants' questionnaire responses, during the interviews, and during times of reflection. Initially, the memos were suggestive; in time, they became more conclusive (Maxwell, 2013).

Data analysis was an iterative process involving reading, coding and categorizing, reflecting and memo writing so that comparisons could be made regarding the congruence of professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories. Categorizing and

comparing processes continued until saturation was achieved; that is, no new information emerged from the data sets. This process provided a conceptual relationship between the data and research questions.

Methods of Verification

Qualitative research requires public disclosure of the inner workings of the methods and processes used in the research, and the reasons for employing each is necessary to safeguard methodological rigor and analytical defensibility (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Verification allowed the researcher "rule out specific plausible alternatives and threats to interpretations and explanations" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125). Two leading verification concerns were researcher bias and reactivity. Researcher bias— acknowledgement of researcher's influence, positive or negative, on the data— was addressed by openly acknowledging that biases exist. Researcher reactivity was the influence the researcher may have had on the participants (i.e., how the participants reacted to the researcher's presence? While eliminating all researcher reactivity was impossible, acknowledging its existence and attempting to minimize obtrusiveness were appropriate.

Researchers have used multiple strategies for testing research conclusions' validity and the existence of potential threats to those conclusions. In this study, four strategies were used to decrease the existence of potential threats to the study's conclusions, thereby increasing the research's validity. These strategies included recursive readings of data from multiple sources, triangulating data sources, using multiple analytical strategies, and maintaining an audit trail.

First, data were collected from field notes of the naturally-occurring observations; the researcher's reflective notes, the participants' personally scribed responses to the questionnaire; the verbatim transcripts from the tape-recorded, semi-structured interviews; and the analytic memos generated during data collection and analysis. Next, the systematic design of triangulation was used to determine if methods with differing strengths and weaknesses collectively supported a single conclusion (Maxwell, 2013). Triangulation is a checks-and-balances method. When the triangulating methods supported a single conclusion, the methods were said to be complementary, in turn increasing the depth of the phenomenon under study. The revelation of more than one conclusion through triangulation indicated either a broader, more complex understanding of the phenomenon than was originally thought, or a misnomer existed among the interactive research components. (Greene, 2007).

Regardless of the research methods and verification strategies, potential vulnerabilities always exist; hence, anticipating possible errors and biases and implementing ways to reduce these was more effective than simply employing multiple verification strategies. Finally, the methods of verification focused on ruling out "specific plausible alternatives and threats to my interpretations and explanations" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 124). Verification methods decreased alternative reasons for findings or misinterpretations of findings.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter Three, the rationale and assumptions for the qualitative research design were presented and the researcher's role was articulated. Furthermore, site selection, research participants, data-collection methods, and analysis strategies were identified. Finally, verification strategies not only supporting the conclusions' credibility, dependability, and confirmability but also reducing potential threats to the conclusions were identified.

This qualitative research study can play an important role in advancing the knowledge base of educational professionals regarding their theories-in-use compared to their espoused theories. This understanding can improve professional practice. Lastly, this study has potential for school districts to review their initial eligibility meeting practices to ensure their practices align with IDEA (2004) law.

Chapter 4

Findings

This study explored education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding the practice of positioning parents as team decision-making partners in the initial individual education programming (IEP) meeting. The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do education professionals position parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting? (Theories-in-Use)

2. How do education professionals describe positioning parents as team decision-making partners during the initial eligibility meeting? (Espoused Theories)

3. What is the relationship between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting? (Congruence/Incongruence)

Research question one was addressed during observations of the education professionals in initial eligibility meetings. Observations sought occurrences of education professionals' actions and interactions (practices) for positioning parents as IEP team decision-making partners based on IDEA (2004) requirements outlined in the *Federal Register* (2006). Three criteria guided data collection for research question one. These criteria were: (a) The IEP meeting-notification document was correctly completed and provided to parents within the specified timelines; (b) The parents were informed of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting; and (c) Parents were engaged in joint discussion concerning the disability's educational impact

prior to determining special education eligibility. When any one of these three criteria were observed, it signified the education professional positioned the parents as IEP team decision-making partners.

Research question two was addressed by education professionals' responses to the web-based questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews. Questionnaire and interview questions were designed to elicit education professionals' descriptions of practices for positioning parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting. Three criteria guided data collection for research question two. These criteria, based on IDEA (2004) requirements outlined in the *Federal Register of IDEA* (2006), were: (a) The professionals described the IEP meeting-notification document's content, purpose, and timelines for providing the notification to parents; (b) The professionals described how parents are informed of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting; and (c) The professionals described how education professionals engaged parents in joint discussion concerning the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility. When any one of these three criteria was met, it signified the education professional described practices for positioning parents as IEP team decision-making partners.

Research question three was addressed with the researcher comparing the education professionals' observed practices and described practices. When education professionals' descriptions of practices (espoused theories) were consistent to their occurrences of observed practices (theories-in-use), the relationship between the two theories was identified as congruent. Conversely, when professionals' described practices

(espoused theories) did not match their occurrences of observed practices (theories-in-use), the relationship between the two theories was identified as incongruent.

The following section is a description of the research participants involved in this study. The section thereafter reports the findings to the research questions. A discussion of the findings, the conclusions, and implications for professional practice and future research are reported in Chapter Five.

Research Participants

School districts and schools.

Education professionals from three school districts (labeled A, B, and C) participated in the study. The six schools in District A are identified as A-1 through A-6; the schools from the remaining two districts are identified as B-1 and C-1, respectively. Demographics of the three districts' communities-at-large, the individual districts, and the participating schools are located in Appendix F.

Education professionals.

Twenty-four professionals participated in this research study. These 24 participants represented 3 professional groups: 8 LEA representatives, 8 special education teachers, and 8 school psychologists. Each IEP team consisted of one professional from each of the respective professional groups. None of the education professionals were involved in more than one IEP meeting. The education professionals' descriptions are located in Appendix G.

Findings

      Research Question One: How do education professionals position parents as team decision-making partners in initial eligibility meetings? Research question one was addressed by researcher observations of the education professionals' practices with parents during the initial eligibility meeting. According to Argyris and Schön's (1974) theories-of-action frame, the observed practices of education professionals positioning parents as IEP team decision-making partners, reflect the professionals' theories-in-use. The three criteria described above were used to guide observed occurrences of practices. Each occurrence of observed practice was noted on statement one of the observation form described in Chapter Three. At the conclusion of each IEP meeting, the occurrences of observed practices were tallied, and the totals were reported as frequency of occurrence with respect to individual education professionals as well as for each IEP team. When an education professional received a tally for an observed occurrence, no additional tallies were made for that professional.

      Criterion one was considered met when education professionals provided the IEP meeting-notification document to parents as outlined in the *Federal Register* (2006). Per the *Federal Register*, the notification must contain the purpose, date, time, place, and invited attendees. Additionally, the notification must be provided to parents at least 10 school days prior to the scheduled meetings. As IDEA (2004) is a legally-binding federal mandate, copies of all records, including the meeting notification, must be maintained in each student's school file. Prior to the initial eligibility meeting, the researcher verified a copy of this accurately completed document was in the student's file.

Criterion two was considered met when education professionals verbally informed parents of their role as IEP team decision-making members as outlined in the *Federal Register* (2006). Per the *Federal Register*, parents must be verbally informed of their role during the initial eligibility meeting. When an education professional informed parents of their team decision-making role, the occurrence of the observed practice was tallied for that professional.

Criterion three was considered met when education professionals engaged parents in joint discussion about the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility. This is an action required in the *Federal Register* (2006). When an education professional was observed engaging parents in this joint discussion, an occurrence of this observed practice was tallied for that professional.

The number and percentage of occurrences of education professionals meeting one or more of three criteria are shown in Table 5. Results are shown in terms of individual participants. Each complying professional is indicated by researcher-assigned codes associated with their respective district and school (e.g., A-1, B-1). Findings for the IEP teams are reported later in this chapter.

Per the *Federal Register of IDEA* (2006), the IEP meeting-notification is provided to parents at least 10 calendar days prior to the initial eligibility meeting. Each school has its own protocol regarding the education professional responsible for completing and providing this notification to parents. As shown in Table 5, the special education teacher was the education professional completing this action for all eight IEP teams. Since the action of providing the notification to parents was completed prior to the initial eligibility

Table 5. Frequencies and Percentages of Education Professionals Complying with One or More Federal Register (2006) Requirements for Initial Special Education Eligibility Meetings

Education Professionals (N = 24)	No. Professionals Complying with Criterion One	No. Professionals Complying with Criterion Two	No. Professionals Complying with Criterion Three
LEA (n = 8)	---NA---	3(37.50%) (A-6, B-1, C-1)	3(37.50%) (A-5, B-1, C-1)
SPED (n = 8)	8*(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)	3(37.50%) (A-6, B-1, C-1)	4(50%) (A-3, A-5, B-1, C-1)
PSYC (n = 8)	---NA---	4(50%) (A-4, A-6, B-1, C-1)	4(50%) (A-3, A-5, B-1, C-1)
Total (N = 24)	8(33.33%)	10(41.67%)	11(45.83%)

*Per the *Federal Register of IDEA* (2006), this action was accomplished prior to the initial eligibility meeting

meeting, it was not possible to observe this action during the meeting. Since this action of providing the notification to parents could not be observed, viewing the notification in the student's school file replaced the observation of providing it to parents. The education professional who correctly completed the notification received credit for meeting criterion one.

When an education professional verbally informed parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting (criterion two), the professional was considered complying with this aspect of the *Federal Register* (2006). As Table 5 shows, of the 24 education professionals, 10 (41.67%) were observed verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities. The following are examples of education professionals' statements informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities:

- A-6 LEA representative said, "All IEP team members, which includes you as Shaun's (pseudonym) parents, need to talk about how to help Shaun in school."

- B-1 LEA representative said to parents, "We need your input to help us make decisions."

- C-1 LEA representative who informed parents of their IEP team decision-making role stated, "After the psychologist tells us the test results, we will decide how to meet Adele's needs (pseudonym), either in the general curriculum or through special education as a gifted student."

- A-6 special education teacher made the following statement to the parents, "All decisions are team decisions; you are always part of that team."

- C-1 special education teacher indicated, "After we review the testing, we will all talk about Adele's (pseudonym) strengths and decide as a team how to best meet her needs as a Gifted student."

- A-4 school psychologist informed parents about their team decision-making role with the comment, "Parents are IEP team members. Your role is to help the IEP team make education decisions about your child."

- B-1 school psychologist stated to parents, "Eligibility for special education is a team decision; you are part of that team."

- C-1 school psychologist encouraged parents' active participation by saying, "You are a part of a team, an IEP team. Your input is needed. Feel free to ask questions. Any concerns, know that you can ask and share your thoughts"

When education professionals were observed engaged in joint discussion with parents regarding the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility, the professional was considered meeting the criterion. Of the 24 education professionals, 11 (45.83%) were observed in this joint discussion with parents (Table 5). For example, one joint discussion involved an elementary school girl identified with a specific learning disability in reading. The school psychologist (B-1) said, "Now, as a team we need to decide if Liza (pseudonym) needs special services based on that learning disability. What does she need, in the area of reading fluency and reading comprehension, that is above and beyond what can be provided in the general curriculum?" The second example involved an elementary school girl who was identified as Intellectually Gifted. The school psychologist (C-1) said, "Adele (pseudonym) meets the criteria for

Gifted….What does she need to meet her educational needs? Does she need any other services beyond those provided by her classroom teacher in the general curriculum setting?"

Data show two education professionals, the B-1 special education teacher and C-1 special education teacher, complied with all three criteria for positioning parents as team decision-making partners in initial special education eligibility meetings (Table 5). In short, 2 (8.33%) education professionals fully complied with IDEA (2004) for including parents as team decision-making partners in initial eligibility meetings.

This concludes results related to research question one. However, IDEA (2004) requirements stipulate that IEP teams, not individual education professionals, are ultimately held responsible for meeting the requirements related to parents as team decision-making partners in initial eligibility meetings. According to IDEA (2004), when one IEP team member complies with initial eligibility meeting requirements, the IEP team has complied with the requirements.

Findings for IEP teams' compliance with IDEA requirements are shown in Table 6. Findings are presented as frequency of occurrences and percentages. IEP teams are indicated by researcher-assigned codes associated with their respective district and school (e.g., A-1, B-1).

Related to criterion one, results shown in Table 6 show at least one education professional from each of the eight IEP teams correctly completed and provided parents with the meeting-notification. Thus, all 8 (100%) IEP teams positioned parents as team decision-making partners. Related to criterion two, results show at least one education

professional from four IEP teams verbally informed parents of their role and responsibilities as IEP team decision-making members during the IEP meeting. Thus, 4 (50%) IEP teams were observed positioning parents as team decision-making partners. Related to criterion three, results show at least one education professional from four IEP teams initiated joint discussion with parents regarding the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility. Thus, 4 (50%) IEP teams positioned parents as team decision-making partners.

Finally, data show at least one education professional from two IEP teams, B-1 and C-1 (Table 6), complied with the three criteria for positioning parents as team decision-making partners in initial special education eligibility meetings. In short, 2 (25%) IEP teams, fully complied with the IDEA (2004) mandate for including parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting. Next, the findings of education professionals' *descriptions* of positioning parents as team decision-making partners during the initial eligibility meeting.

Table 6 Frequencies and Percentages of IEP Teams Complying with One or More Criteria based on the Federal Register of IDEA (2006)

No. IEP Teams Complying with Criteria (N = 8)	No. Professionals Complying with Criterion One	No. Professionals Complying with Criterion Two	No. Professionals Complying with Criterion Three
IEP Teams (N = 8)	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)	4(50%) (A-4, A-6, B-1, C-1)	4(50%) (A-3, A-5, B-1, C-1)
Total	8(100%)	4(50%)	4(50%)

Research Question Two: How do education professionals describe positioning parents as team decision-making partners during the initial eligibility meeting? Research question two was addressed by the education professionals' responses to the web-based questionnaire and semi-structured interview. According to Argyris and Schön (1974), when education professionals provided descriptions of practices for positioning parents as IEP team decision-making partners, these descriptions reflected the education professionals' espoused theories. Guided by federal eligibility requirements in IDEA (2004) and the *Federal Register* (2006), the following criteria were used to identify professionals' descriptions of how they positioned parents: (a) The education professionals described the content, purpose, and timeline for providing the IEP meeting-notification document to parents; (b) Education professionals described how parents are informed of their role and responsibilities as IEP team decision-making members; and (c) Education professionals described how parents are engaged in joint discussion concerning the disability's educational impact.

In most instances, individual education professionals gave consistent descriptions in both the questionnaire and interview. Occasionally, a professional's description in the questionnaire was not consistent with the description he or she gave in the interview. For the purposes of this study, with respect to a particular criterion, when a professional described a practice that positioned parents as IEP team decision-making partners, the practice was considered meeting the criterion, regardless if it was given in response to the questionnaire or occurred in the interview. When education professionals described practices that aligned the criterion as outlined in the *Federal Register* (2006), tallies were

made and totals were reported as frequency of occurrences and percentages for each education professional. They were also reported for each IEP team.

Criterion one was considered met when education professionals described the practice of providing parents the IEP meeting-notification as outlined with the *Federal Register* (2006) (e.g., the notification's contents, purpose, and timeline). Criterion two was considered met when education professionals described the practice of verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting. The following statement and question were posed by the researcher to elicit professionals' description of this practice: (a) Describe the parents' role and responsibilities during the initial eligibility meeting; and (b) How are parents informed of their role and responsibilities?

Criterion three was considered met when education professionals described the practice of engaging parents in joint discussion regarding the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility. The following question was posed by the researcher to elicit professionals' description of this practice: When special education is being considered by the IEP team, what must be discussed in order to determine special education eligibility? The following are examples of education professionals' statements that relate to initiating their joint discussion with parents:

- A1-LEA representative: "Special education is an IEP team decision …we look at the impact a disability has in three areas. Is it impacting the student's attendance, is it impacting their academics, or is it impacting their behavior and need for

discipline? We look at all the data to make our decision if they need special education."

- A1-special education teacher: "We have to focus on …whether the child is adversely affected by the disability…does the disability adversely affect them in the classroom. If so, we determine the appropriate services for the child. Communication with all team members, especially the parent, is extremely important."

- A4-special education teacher: "Special education eligibility is a two-edged sword …you have to say they qualified for the disability; but do I think they should also be eligible for special education, or do I not? For them to be eligible, there has to be educational impact; to me, that is how their disability impacts their education. How much different do they look than everybody else?"

- A5-school psychologist: "I usually use educational impact as a fairly broad term of academic impact, but that could also be a social impact or behavioral impact on their learning. If academics, social, or behavior does really impede how the student learns and functions in the school setting, then the team needs to determine if special education is the right route for addressing those deficits… if it's truly an educational disability with educational impact. I think it's good when teams come to the meeting not having everyone already decided and where it really is a discussion."

- A6-special education teacher: "The team must determine if the disability significantly interferes with the students' education. Obviously the more severe

the disability, the more likely they are going to need the special ed services; but

… it is always going to be a team decision ….”

- A6-school psychologist: “The IEP team has to determine…if the child's

  difficulties are significantly interfering with their school performance.”

- B1-school psychologist: “I go over the disability criteria; then if we say there is a

  disability, then we discuss the eligibility for special education. At one time, there

  was a tendency to have that foregone conclusion. If the student meets the

  disability criterion, obviously they are going to be eligible for special education;

  but that isn’t always true. Now, we have to address their need for services.”

- C-1 LEA representative: “In my opinion, when deciding if a child *needs* special

  education services these are the most important factors to consider; the child’s test

  results, the teacher’s input, the parent’s input, and then *team* decision-making.”

- C-1 special education teacher: “Communication, communication, communication.

  A willingness to listen and consider another team member’s thoughts and ideas.

  We need to talk and process before making a decision.”

- C-1-school psychologist: “As a team we need to achieve a mutual understanding

  of the child’s needs and determine a realistic plan to meet them.”

When education professionals described practices aligned with IDEA (2004)

requirements, the practice was marked “yes”; when it did not meet the criterion, it was

marked “no.” The results are shown in Table 7. Results are summarized by individual

education professionals. Each complying professional is indicated by researcher-assigned codes associated with their respective district and school (e.g., A-I, A-2). Findings for IEP teams are reported later in this chapter.

Based on results shown in Table 7, the total responses of education professionals who described IDEA (2004) requirements for initial eligibility meetings can be summarized as follows: (a) 17 (75%) described the practice of providing parents the IEP meeting notification; including the contents, purpose, and timeline (criterion one); (b) 14 (58.33%) described the practice of verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting (criterion two); and (c) 21 (87.50%) described the practice of initiating joint discussion with parents regarding the

Table 7 Frequencies and Percentages of Education Professionals Describing One or More Federal Register (2006) Requirements for Initial Special Education Eligibility Meetings

Education Professionals (N = 24)	No. Professionals Describing Criterion One	No. Professionals Describing Criterion Two	No. Professionals Describing Criterion Three
LEA (n = 8)	3(37.50%) (A-1, A-6, C-1)	4(50%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-5)	6(75%) (A-1, A-2, A-4, A-6, B-1, C-1)
SPED (n = 8)	6(75%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-6, C-1)	6(75%) (A-1, A-2, A-4, A-5, A-6, C-1)	7(87.50%) (A-1, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)
PSYC (n = 8)	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)	4(50%) (A-1, A-2, A-6, B-1)	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)
Total	17(70.83%)	14(58.33%)	21(87.50%)

disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility (criterion three).

Data show nine education professionals, (A-1 LEA, SPED, PSYC; A-2 PSYC; A-4 SPED; A-6 SPED and PSYC; B-1 PSYC; and C-1 SPED) complied with all three criteria for positioning parents as team decision-making partners in initial special education eligibility meetings (Table 7). In short, 9 (37.50%) education professionals fully complied with IDEA (2004) mandate for including parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting.

Findings for IEP teams describing one or more criteria are shown in Table 8. According to IDEA (2004), when one IEP team member complies with initial eligibility meeting requirements, the IEP team has complied with the requirements. Result are shown in terms of the number and percentage of IEP teams meeting each criterion. The IEP teams are indicated by researcher-assigned codes associated with their respective district and school (e.g., A-1, B-1).

Related to criterion one, results shown in Table 8 reveal that at least one education professional from each of the eight IEP teams described the practice of correctly completing and providing parents the IEP meeting-notification document within the specified timelines. Thus all 8 (100%) teams described the practice of positioning parents as team decision-making partners. Related to criterion two, results show at least one education professional from all eight IEP teams described the practice of verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities. Thus, all 8 (100%) IEP teams described the practice of positioning parents as team decision-making

Table 8. Frequencies and Percentages of IEP Teams Describing One or More Federal
Register (2006) Requirements for Initial Special Education Eligibility Meetings

IEP Teams (N = 8)	No. IEP Teams Describing Criterion One	No. IEP Teams Describing Criterion Two	No. IEP Teams Describing Criterion Three
IEP Teams (N = 8)	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)
Total	8(100%)	8(100%)	8(100%)

partners. Related to criterion three, results show at least one education professional from all eight IEP teams described the practice of initiating joint discussion with parents regarding the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility. Thus, 8 (100%) IEP teams described the practice of positioning parents as team decision-making partners.

Data show at least one education professional from all 8 (100%) IEP teams described all three criteria for positioning parents as team decision-making partners in initial special education eligibility meetings. In short, all 8 (100%) IEP teams described IDEA (2004) requirements for positioning parents as team decision-making partners in initial eligibility meetings. Next, findings related to research questions one and two are used to compare the education professionals' and IEP teams' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding parents as team decision-making partners. These comparisons show the relationship between theories-in-use and espoused theories as congruent or incongruent.

Research Question Three: What is the relationship between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding parents as team decision-making partners in initial eligibility meetings? Research question three was addressed by comparing results from research question one with results from research question two. The relationship between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories was identified as congruent or incongruent based on comparisons of their *observed* practices (Table 5) to their *descriptions* of practices (Table 7) of positioning parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting.

Theories-in-use refers to education professionals' observed practices; espoused theories refers to education professionals' described practices. According to the Argyris and Schön's (1974) frame, when education professionals' theories-in-use were consistent to their espoused theories, the relationship between the two theories was congruent. Conversely, when education professionals' theories-in-use were inconsistent to their espoused theories, the relationship between the two theories was incongruent. This comparison was made for individual education professionals as well as for IEP teams.

Table 9 shows the instances of congruence among individual education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories for: (a) correctly completing and providing the IEP meeting-notification to parents within the specified timeline (criterion one); (b) verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting (criterion two); and (c) jointly discussing with parents the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility (criterion three). Education professionals are indicated by researcher-assigned codes associated with their respective district and school (e.g., A-1, B-1).

As shown in Table 9, 8 (33.33%) education professionals correctly completed and provided parents the IEP meeting-notification within the specified timeline (criterion one, theories-in-use), while 17 (70.83%) education professionals described this practice (criterion one, espoused theories). Findings show 10 (41.67%) education professionals verbally informed parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting (criterion two, theories-in-use), while 14 (58.33%) described this practice (criterion two, espoused theories). Findings show 11 (45.83%) education

Table 9 Frequencies and Percentages of Education Professionals' Compliance & Descriptions of Theories-in-Use and Espoused Theories in terms of Three Criteria

Education Professionals Theories-of-Action (N = 24)	No. Professionals Complying with and Describing Criterion One	No. Professionals Complying with and Describing Criterion Two	No. Professionals Complying with and Describing Criterion Three
Theories-in-Use	8(33.33%) (A-1 SPED; A-2 SPED; A-3 SPED; A-4 SPED; A-5 SPED; A-6 SPED; B-1 SPED; C-1 SPED)	10(41.67%) (A-4 PSYC; A-6 LEA, SPED & PSYC; B-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC; C-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC)	11(45.83%) (A-3 SPED & PSYC; A-5 LEA, SPED & PSYC; B-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC; C-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC)
Espoused Theories	17(70.83%) A-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC; A-2 SPED & PSYC; A-3 SPED & PSYC; A-4 SPED & PSYC; A-5 PSYC; A-6 LEA, SPED & PSYC; B-1 PSYC; C-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC)	14(58.33%) (A-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC; A-2 LEA, SPED & PSYC; A-3 LEA; A-4 SPED; A-5 LEA & SPED; A-6 SPED & PSYC; B-1 PSYC; C-1 SPED)	21(87.50%) (A-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC; A-2 LEA & PSYC; A-3 SPED & PSYC; A-4 LEA, SPED & PSYC; A-5 SPED & PSYC; A-6 LEA, SPED & PSYC; B-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC; C-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC)

professionals engaged parents in joint discussion regarding the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility (criterion three, theories-in-use), while 21 (58.33%) education professionals described this joint discussion (criterion three, espoused theories).

The data show that the education professionals who were observed positioning parents as IEP team members were not necessarily the same professionals who described this positioning. The number and percentage of occurrences of education professionals who were consistent with their observed and described practices of: (a) correctly completing and providing parents the IEP meeting-notification within specified timelines (criterion one); (b) verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making roles and responsibilities during the IEP meeting (criterion two), and (c) jointly discussing with parents the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility (criterion three) are shown in Table 9. Results are summarized by individual educational professionals. Each professional is indicated by researcher-assigned codes associated with their respective district and school (e.g., A-1, B-1). Findings for the IEP teams are reported later in this chapter.

Results in Table 10 show 6 (25%) education professionals evinced congruency between their observed (theories-in-use) and described (espoused theories) practices with respect to criterion one, correctly completing and providing parents with the IEP meeting notification within the specified timeline. A total of 4 (16.67%) education professionals evinced congruency between their observed (theories-in-use) and described (espoused theories) practices with respect to criterion two, verbally informing parents of their IEP

Table 10 Frequencies and Percentages of Education Professionals' Congruence of Theories-In-Use and Espoused Theories in Terms of Three Criteria

	No. Professionals Congruent with Theories-in-Use (Observed Practices) and Espoused Theories (Described Practices)		
Theories-of-Action Congruence (N = 24)	Criterion One	Criterion Two	Criterion Three
Congruence between Theories-in-Use and Espoused Theories	6(25%) (A-1 SPED; A-2 SPED; A-3 SPED; A-4 SPED; A-6 SPED; C-1 SPED)	4(16.67%) (A-6 SPED & PSYC; B-1 PSYC; C-1 SPED)	10(41.67%) (A-3 SPED & PSYC; A-5 SPED & PSYC; B-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC; C-1 LEA, SPED & PSYC)

team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP team meeting. Finally, 10 education professionals evinced congruency between their observed (theories-in-use) and described (espoused theories) practices with respect to criterion three, jointly discussing with parents the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility.

The relationship between IEP *teams'* theories-in-use and espoused theories was identified as congruent or incongruent based on comparisons of their observed practices to their descriptions of practices for positioning parents as team decision-making partners. When the IEP teams' theories-in-use were consistent with their descriptions of espoused theories, the relationship between the two theories was identified as congruent. Conversely, when the education professionals' theories-in-use were inconsistent to their espoused theories, the relationship between the two theories was identified as incongruent. The relationship between IEP *teams'* theories-in-use and espoused theories was identified as congruent or incongruent based on comparisons of their observed practices to their descriptions of practices for positioning parents as team decision-making partners. When the IEP teams' theories-in-use were consistent with their descriptions of espoused theories, the relationship between the two theories was identified as congruent. Conversely, when the professionals' theories-in-use were inconsistent to their espoused theories, the relationship between the two theories was identified as incongruent. Table 11 shows the instances of congruence for IEP teams. IEP teams are indicated by researcher-assigned codes associated with their respective district and school (e.g., A-1, B-1).

Table 11 Frequencies and Percentages of IEP Teams' Compliance with Three Criteria, by Theories-in-Use and Espoused Theories

IEP Teams Theories-of-Action (N = 8)	No. IEP Teams Complying with Criterion One	No. IEP Teams Complying with Criterion Two	No. IEP Teams Complying with Criterion Three
Theories-in-Use	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)	4(50%) (A-4, A-6, B-1, C-1)	4(50%) (A-3, A-5, B-1, C-1)
Espoused Theories	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)

Results in Table 11 show one education professional from eight IEP teams correctly completed and provided the IEP meeting-notification document to parents within the specified timeline. Results reviewed from Table 9 showed at least one education professional from each of the eight IEP teams described this same practice; thus all eight IEP teams described the practice. In short, all 8 (100%) IEP teams were congruent with their theories-in-use and espoused theories for correctly completing and providing the meeting-notification to parents within the specified timeline.

Results in Table 11 show one education professional from four IEP teams verbally informed parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting. Results reviewed from Table 9 showed at least one education professional from each of the eight IEP teams described this same practice; thus all eight IEP teams described the practice. In short, 4 (50%) IEP teams were congruent with their theories-in-use and espoused theories for verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting.

Results in Table 11 show one education professional from four IEP teams engaged parents in joint discussion regarding the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility. Results reviewed from Table 9 showed at least one education professional from each of the eight IEP teams described this same practice; thus all eight IEP teams described the practice. In short, 4 (50%) IEP teams were congruent with their theories-in-use and espoused theories for jointly discussing the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility.

Results in Table 12 show 8 (100%) IEP teams evinced congruency between their observed (theories-in-use) and described practices (espoused theories) with respect to correctly completing and providing the IEP meeting-notification to parents within the specified timeline (criterion one). A total of 4 (50%) IEP teams evinced congruency between their observed (theories-in-use) and described (espoused theories) practices with respect to verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting (criterion two). Lastly, 4 (50%) IEP teams evinced congruency between their observed (theories-in-use) and described (espoused theories) practices with respect to jointly discussing with parents the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility (Table 12).

This concludes the report of findings. These findings will be discussed in Chapter Five, along with conclusions and implications for professional practice and further research.

Table 12 Frequencies and Percentages of IEP Teams' Congruence of Theories-In-Use and Espoused Theories in Terms of Three Criteria

Theories-of Action Congruence	No. IEP Teams Congruent with Theories-in-Use (Observed Practices) and Espoused Theories (Described Practices)		
	Criterion One	Criterion Two	Criterion Three
Congruence between Theories-in-Use and Espoused Theories	8(100%) (A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, B-1, C-1)	4(50%) (A-4, A-6, B-1, C-1)	4(50%) (A-3, A-5, B-1, C-1)

Chapter 5

Summary and Implications

Chapter Five begins with a summary of the study; then the findings are discussed. Thereafter, conclusions are made, followed by implications for professional practice and further research.

Summary of the Study

The IDEA (2004) is a federal special education mandate requiring school districts to actively include parents as IEP team members with decision-making rights. The purpose of this study was to examine whether education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) were congruent to their descriptions of practices (espoused theories) regarding the positioning of parents as team decision-making partners in the initial special education eligibility meeting. This study utilized Maxwell's (2013) interactive research design with Argyris and Schön's (1974) theories-of-action frame to examine education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use), descriptions of practice (espoused theories), and the congruence or lack of congruence between their theories-in-use and espoused theories.

First examined was whether education professionals' observed practices aligned to *Federal Register of IDEA* (2006) requirements regarding parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting. When observed practices aligned to the *Federal Register*, the IDEA (2004) mandate was met; that is, parents were included as IEP team decision-making partners. Next, education professionals were asked to describe initial eligibility meeting practices. When their described practices aligned to the *Federal*

Register, this showed the education professional identified and articulated the specific practices intended to include parents as IEP team decision-making partners. Next examined was the congruence of education professionals' observed practices to their descriptions of practices. When observed and described practices were congruent to one another, it strengthened the assertion that education professionals knew and practiced the intended purpose of the *Federal Register* requirements regarding the positioning of parents as IEP team members with decision-making rights. Studies show students' with disabilities educational and social outcomes improve when parents are included and participatory in their children's special education processes (Nowell & Salem, 2007). Additionally, when parents and education professionals work together as equalized partners, meeting outcomes are likely to be more effective and satisfying (Harnett, 2012; Moecker, 1989; Savaya & Gardner, 2012; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006).

For every student referred for special education consideration, their parents, teachers, and relevant education professionals convene to make significant educational decisions with potentially life-long implications for the student (Garda, 2004). Due to the life-changing implications, IDEA's (2004) rigorous IEP processes require strict adherence. One major procedural requirement is parents' involvement as IEP team participants, including their active and equal participation in the eligibility, programming, and placement decision-making processes (Drasgow, Yell, & Robinson, 2001; Hill, 2010). Parental participation relies heavily on the procedural practices of the education professionals, namely the LEA representative, special education teacher, and school

psychologist. As the findings show, while education professionals are responsible for parents' team participation, education professionals are sometimes unaware, negligent, or resistant in their procedural practices. This study's findings indicate whether *Federal Register* (2006) requirements were observed and/or described. Possible reasons are offered for the discrepancies between observed and described practices and their alignment with the *Federal Register*.

As reported in Drasgow, Yell, and Robinson (2001), several school districts have been found in violation of procedural practices; court dockets and the literature show repeated violations of not fully involving parents as equal partners in the IEP process. When school districts are found to violate major procedural practices, a hearing officer or court is likely to render an IEP inappropriate (Bateman & Linden, 1988; Yell & Drasgow, 2000). "Courts have scrutinized the effects of the violations when they have detected procedural violations in the IEP process" (p. 365).

When the IEP and/or IEP process is deemed inappropriate, consequences can be significant for the school system. These consequences may include: litigation, compensatory services for the child, damaged relationships between parents and education professionals, and associated consequential effects on the student (Drasgow, Yell, & Robinson, 2001). Due to the legal necessity for education professionals to position parents as team decision-making partners, this study examined whether education professionals' procedural practices for positioning parents during the initial eligibility meeting aligned with the *Federal Register* (2006). These requirements were: (a) correctly completing and providing parents the IEP meeting-notification within the

specified timeline (criterion one); (b) verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the initial eligibility meeting (criterion two); and (c) jointly discussing with parents the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility (criterion three).

Past research has not examined education professionals' observed and described practices regarding the *Federal Register's* (2006) requirements for including parents as team decision-making partners. As the initial eligibility meeting sets the stage for parents' role as IEP team partners, the lack of research regarding education professionals' observed (theories-in-use) and described (espoused theories) practices indicates the need for investigating this important part of the IEP process. In a culture of accountability and litigiousness, practices that adhere to legal requirements and foster a positive outcome are beneficial for the student, parents, and the school system.

While the law specifically entitles parents' active participation in the initial eligibility meeting (34 C.F.R. 614(b)(4)(A)) and the research supports this (Goepel, 2009; Malone & Gallagher, 2010; Pfeiffer, 1980; Pruitt, Wandry, & Hollums, 1998), parents typically do not have knowledge or understanding of their rights and responsibilities as team decision-making partners. Thus, it is the responsibility of the education professionals to follow proper procedure so parents are positioned to be active, equal, and contributing IEP team members. As education professionals are responsible for including parents, the inclusion and positioning of parents as team decision-making partners was this study's focus.

This research occurred in three Southeastern school districts involving eight schools during the spring of 2014. Twenty-four education professionals were identified as research participants; there were three discipline-specific professional groups with eight education professionals per group; LEA representatives, special education teachers, and school psychologists. IEP teams included one participant from each of the three professional groups.

Data collection began by observing one IEP team per school. The observation provided a view of education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) for positioning parents as team decision-making partners. During the observation, the education professionals' observed practices were documented on the researcher-developed observation form. Data was also collected from education professionals' responses to the web-based questionnaire and semi-structured interview. All data was compared to the three criteria outlined in the *Federal Register* (2006).

As a diagnostic tool, theories-of-action account for determining if espoused theories (e.g., what people say they do or think they do) is consistent with their theories-is-use (e.g., what people are observed doing). When the two theories are consistent, they are considered congruent. Congruence strengthens the assertion that education professional's comply with (theories-in-use) and can articulate the intended purpose for (espoused theories) the required procedural practices regarding the IDEA mandate that parents are IEP team members with decision-making rights.

In contrast, when espoused theories are inconsistent with their theories-in-use, the two theories are considered incongruent. Incongruence supports at least the following two

suppositions. First, the education professional knows a procedural practice well enough to demonstrate it (theories-in-use); however, may not fully understand the purpose of the procedural practice or attribute it as a *Federal Register* (2006) requisite for the purpose of IDEA's mandate to include parents as team decision-making partners (espoused theories). Second, the education professional is able, *when asked*, to articulate what procedural practices must be accomplished in the initial eligibility meeting (espoused theories) but does not demonstrate the practice (theories-in-use). This lack of demonstration may be attributed to a number of reasons, such as a lack of awareness, negligence, resistance, or one education professional completed the practice and the other professionals understood that no further action was necessary. This study addressed the research questions:

1. How do education professionals position parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting? (Theories-in-Use)

2. How do education professionals describe positioning parents as team decision-making partners during the initial eligibility meeting? (Espoused Theories)

3. What is the relationship between education professionals' theories-in-use and espoused theories regarding parents as team decision-making partners in the initial eligibility meeting? (Congruence/Incongruence)

Related to research question one, findings showed less than 50% of the 24 education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) complied with the F*ederal Register's* (2006) three requirements. Related to research question two, findings showed more than 50% of the 24 education professionals described practices (espoused theories)

complied with the *Federal Register's* (2006) three requirements. Related to research question three, findings showed only 25% of the education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) and described practices (espoused theories) were congruent for criterion one; less than 20% of the education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) and described practices (espoused theories) were congruent for criterion two; and slightly more than 40% of the education professionals' observed practices (theories-in-use) and described practices (espoused theories) were congruent for criterion three.

The findings showed education professionals' described practices were more aligned to the federal requirements than were their actual practices. This was true for the IEP meeting notification (criterion one); verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making rights and responsibilities (criterion two); and jointly discussing with parents the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility (criterion three).

Although the study's research questions did not address IEP teams' observed (theories-in-use) and described practices (espoused theories), the data allowed comparison of IEP teams' observed practices and described practices. Related to research question one, findings showed 100% of the IEP teams complied with the *Federal Register's* requirements regarding the IEP meeting-notification (criterion one); 50% of the IEP teams verbally informed parents of their IEP team decision-making role during the IEP meeting (criterion two); and 50% jointly discussed the disability's educational impact before determining special education eligibility (criterion three).

Related to research question two, findings showed 100% of the IEP teams descriptions of practices were aligned with the *Federal Register's* requirements for the IEP meeting notification (criterion one). One hundred percent of the IEP teams verbally informed parents of their IEP team decision-making role during the IEP meeting (criterion two). Also, 100% of the IEP teams jointly discussed the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility (criterion three).

Related to research question three, findings showed 100% of the IEP teams showed 100% congruence for the IEP meeting-notification (criterion one). Fifty percent of the IEP teams showed congruence for verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role during the IEP meeting (criterion two). Finally, 50% of the IEP teams showed congruence for jointly discussing the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility (criterion three).

Discussion of the Findings

Results showed the three education professionals representing district B complied with the procedural practice requirements for criterion two (verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role during the IEP meeting) and complied with the requirements for criterion three (jointly discussing the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility). Similarly, the three education professionals representing district C simultaneously complied with the procedural practice requirements for criteria two and three. In contrast, none of the education professionals representing district A complied with the procedural practice requirements for criteria two and three.

With all individual education professionals in B-1 complying with the *Federal Register's* (2006) requirements for criteria two and three, IEP team B-1 also exhibited compliance to these same two *Federal Register* (2006) requirements. Similarly, with all education professionals in C-1 complying with the *Federal Register's* (2006) requirements for criteria two and three, IEP team C-1 also exhibited compliance to these same two *Federal Register* (2006) requirements. While teams from District A exhibiting compliance to criterion two (e.g., A-4 and A-6) and criterion three (e.g., A-3 and A-5), their compliance was based on a minimum of one education professional adhering to the requirements and not all three.

Education professionals' described practices were more aligned to the federal requirements than were their observed practices. This finding shows, *upon request* or *when asked,* many education professionals identified what procedural compliance practices to describe for including parents as IEP team members with decision-making rights. However, descriptions of procedural practices did not guarantee compliant practice; this lack of compliant practice is a concern. More discussion is necessary to evaluate and understand this lack of compliance.

This lack of compliant behavior may be a theory-to-practice issue. This challenge of integrating w*hat should be* (e.g., theory) to *what is* (e.g., practice) is addressed in the IEP meeting research. Legal and best practice guidelines emphasize that parents should be equal partners in special education decision-making; however, the literature repeatedly shows practice is inconsistent with theory, and that parents are not positioned as equal

partners in the special education decision-making process. This theory-to-practice gap is repetitive in the literature:

- Professionals assume a dominant role and position parents into a subservient role (Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000);

- Education professionals assume the role of expert, thereby positioning parents as non-expert (Stoner et al., 2005);

- Education professionals have a history of expecting parents to comply rather than being active participants in their child's IEP meeting (Feinberg & Vacca, 2000);

- School officials minimized and/or rejected parents' contributions to the shared decision-making process (Rock & Bateman, 2009); and

- Education professionals' discursive practices exclude rather than include parents in the special education processes (Fish, 2006; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Mehan, 1983; Morgan, 2005; Rogers, 2002, 2003; Vehkakoski, 2008).

Results also showed education professionals were more adherent to the initial eligibility meeting procedural practice requirements that are documented on a specifically designated form and are maintained in the student's school file. There are two such examples in this study. The first example is the IEP meeting-notification (criterion one) and the second example is the eligibility report (criterion three). The IEP meeting-notification is the first formal reference that notifies parents of the upcoming IEP meeting. The IEP meeting notification is a legally binding document showing the school

district properly notified parents that they are included as IEP team members with decision-making rights. Adherence for this practice was low for the individual education professionals; however, complete adherence was noted for all IEP teams. The low adherence for the individual education professionals was likely due to the fact that only one education professional per IEP team is required to send the document to parents. For all IEP teams, the special education teacher was the professional who provided the meeting-notification to parents. Data from the questionnaire and interview indicated the special education teacher was the designated person in the school to send the notification. It seems reasonable to assume that the remaining education professionals (e.g., LEA representatives and school psychologists) did not notify parents as the requirement was fulfilled by the special education teacher.

The eligibility report is another legally-binding document maintained in the student's file. The procedural practice associated with this document is the education professionals engaging in joint discussion with parents regarding the disability's educational impact. This procedural practice had the highest adherence of the three requirements. This document also requires all IEP team members' signatures verifying that the joint discussion occurred with parents.

The remaining procedural practice required the education professionals to verbally inform parents of their IEP team decision-making role and responsibilities during the IEP meeting (criterion two). While this is a federal requirement and documentation must occur, the specificity as to how this procedural practice occurs is less delineated in the *Federal Register* (2006) than the other two procedural practices.

Furthermore, the verification that this procedural practice occurred is less explicit as this procedural practice does not have its own documentation form signifying the practice actually occurred. Meanwhile, the IEP meeting notification (criterion one) and the eligibility report (criterion three) each have designated forms, which are maintained in the student's school file that can be readily accessed to confirm whether or not the procedural practice occurred. Conversely, there is not a designated form for the purpose of documenting that parents were verbally informed of their team decision-making role (criterion three). One conclusion for this low adherence may be the lack of a designated form that specifically asserts parents were informed of their IEP team decision-making role.

During the initial eligibility meeting, each education professional has a specific role to fulfill associated with their professional background and training. The LEA representative is responsible for overseeing the continuum of service options (e.g., programming) and placement decisions. In addition to discipline-specific roles and responsibilities, a number of procedural practice requirements must be accomplished to ensure the child receives due process as eligibility is considered. The LEA representative is responsible for overseeing programming and placement decisions. With each reauthorization of IDEA (2004), the LEA representative's role has shifted from manager to regulator of educational programs for students with disabilities (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006). Knowledge of special education law and procedures is critical when overseeing special education programs because judicial consequences result when practices are not in compliance with

federal mandates (Davidson & Algozzine, 2002). LEA representatives express limited knowledge of special education curriculum, practices and procedures (Collins & White, 2001).

Results showed LEA representatives demonstrated limited knowledge of the procedural practices outlined in the Federal Register (2006) which were developed to include parents as decision-making partners. Findings mirrored the research literature in that LEA representatives candidly admit that due to their lack of knowledge of the intricacies of special education services and regulations, they have remained uninvolved as a key player in special education processes (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000). In the past, most special education practices, particularly procedural practices, were addressed by the discipline-specific personnel. The inclusion of LEA representatives as special education overseers is relatively new. Due to the LEA representatives' inability to describe procedural requirements and similar research findings, this may indicate many LEA representatives have limited knowledge, experience, and/or confidence regarding special education law, procedural practices, and possibly the associated consequences for non-compliance.

Lastly, the IEP team as a unit, and not individual professionals, is required to comply with IDEA (2004) mandates and the *Federal Register's* (2006) procedural practices. There was evidence in my findings of the teams' described and observed practices being higher than was the case for the individual professionals. Also, the congruency between observed and described practices was higher for IEP teams than the individual professionals. While the IEP team is accountable for IDEA (2004) compliance,

the IEP team is dependent on each education professional to practice required procedures. It is the structure of the multi-disciplinary IEP team that affords the opportunity for each discipline-specific professional to focus on their unique role, yet also function interdependently as a team; hence a benefit of multidisciplinary teams. An example of this in my study was the notification document being sent by the special education professional and not any other professional. This is a unique role typically filled by the special education teacher and other education professionals are dependent on the special education teacher to complete this criterion.

This statement's corollary can also hold true. When none of the education professionals initiate or correctly complete a required procedural practice, the IEP team will be considered negligent in the required procedural practice. For instance, interdependence is helpful when an education professional on the IEP team is unaware, negligent, or engages in noncompliant practice. The team concept approach increases the team's opportunity to have at least one currently informed and compliant education professional. The benefit for education professionals to function interdependently so all procedural practices is correctly completed.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are offered from the study's findings and discussion.

1. The results show all education professionals from the smaller school districts, B and C, exhibited increased compliance to the *Federal Register's* (2006) procedural practice requirements relative to the education professionals from the larger school district, A.

2. Findings support the conclusion that IEP team members are reliant on one another to comply with procedural practice requirements; this was evidenced regarding the IEP meeting-notification (criterion one). As previously described, only one IEP team member is required to provide the IEP meeting-notification to parents. Results show the special education teacher from each IEP team provided parents this notification. As such, all special education teachers complied with this Federal Register (2006) requirement; in turn, all eight IEP teams complied with the first of three Federal Register requirements.

3. Findings support the conclusion that education professionals adhered more to procedural practice requirements that are documented on a specifically designated form that is maintained in the student's school file. This conclusion is derived from the findings related to low adherence of education professionals verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-making role during the IEP meeting (criterion two). As previously stated, of the study's three criteria for positioning parents as IEP team decision-making members, this criterion is implied/embedded within the *Federal Register* (2006), while the other two criteria are specifically described and there is no designated form asserting that this procedural practices occurred. Of the three criterion, this was the least adhered criterion.

4. Findings support the conclusion of a theory-to-practice gap. This conclusion is derived from the observations of education professionals jointly discussing the disability's educational impact prior to determining special education eligibility (criterion three). Of the study's three criteria, criterion three showed a disparity

between education professionals' observed and described practices that is meaningfully accounted for as a theory-to-gap issue.

5. The findings support the conclusion that LEA representatives are in a vulnerable spot regarding the breadth and depth of the information they must know and be able to act upon at any one moment. However, as indicated in legal rulings, their knowledge of special education law and procedural requirements is critical. Information from the study's questionnaire and interview excerpts are similar to the literature; LEA representatives want to know more about their role and responsibilities in IEP meetings and with special education in general.

6. Findings show multi-disciplinary IEP teams bring varied knowledge and skill sets to initial eligibility meetings. However, an IEP team is only as compliant with IDEA (2004) mandates as its most informed IEP team member. Even with informed IEP team members, a variety of events can occur causing the most informed member(s) to be unaware or negligent with completing a required procedural practice. It is essential all education professionals are informed of basic special education law, procedural practices, and potential consequences for procedural and substantive errors. Possibly most important, all education professionals should know they can and should end a meeting when the content and/or practices are too over-whelming. An IEP team can always stop a meeting early (document!) and reconvene at a later date when charting unfamiliar territory. When unsure what to do, seeking guidance is never wrong.

Implications for Practice and Research

  Education professionals would clearly benefit from instruction related to special education law and procedural requirements. Additionally, ongoing professional development training is indicated. I am not implying pre-service training and ongoing professional development is a panacea; rather the evidence supports introductory and ongoing will increase education professionals' knowledge for fundamental practices that are legally-binding and considered best-practice. This implication is appropriate for addressing the four conclusions. This suggestion is driven by my findings, my conclusions as they relate to the research literature, and my own professional practice knowledge and experiences.

  IDEA (2004) is federal law; its mandates require education professionals' attention and compliance. The *Federal Register* (2006) provides procedural practice requirements; compliance to these requirements results in IDEA compliance. Findings are clear; a number of education professionals are generally able to describe practices, aligned to the *Federal Register*, but do not necessarily comply with what is expected. In the IEP team meeting, it is acceptable for only one education professional to demonstrate the expected requirement. Hence, IEP team compliance often occurs because one team member followed through with the required practices. This is procedurally acceptable. However, if all IEP teams had at least one education professional complete each requirement, adherence for all IEP teams' observed and described practices would be 100% and congruence for all three practices would be 100%. As this is not the case, more education professionals need to be able to describe correct procedures and be able to

demonstrate correct procedures. Training can be beneficial to make certain education

professionals know and understand the legal requirements of IDEA (2004), the associated

procedural requirements, and the detrimental consequences (e.g., litigation, compensatory

services, mistrust between parents and education professionals, and secondary effects on

students) when IDEA is not followed to the letter of the law.

The need for training is shown by some of the education professionals' lack of

observed and/or described practices with: (a) providing parents the IEP meeting-

notification (criterion one); (b) verbally informing parents of their IEP team decision-

making role and responsibilities during the initial eligibility meeting (criterion two); and

(c) jointly discussing with parents the disability's educational impact before determining

special education eligibility (criterion three). While individual education professionals

may not have been observed or may not have described one or more of these practices,

many times other education professionals on the same IEP team filled in the gap with

either completing or describing the task.

Supporting the implication for education professionals' preparatory training is

also noted in the research. As stated in Wolfe and Harriott (1998), "more intensive

training may need to be given to education personnel" (p. 90). Specifically,

(a) LEA administrators lack understanding of special education services, knowledge

of current issues in special education, and special education policies (Collins &

White, 2001; Davidson & Algozzine, 2002; Davidson & Gooden, 2001; Patterson,

Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell,

2006);

(b) teacher-preparation trainings (Ford, Pugach, & Otis-Wilborn, 2001; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Harris, 2010; Malone & Gallagher, 2010; Patterson, Webb, & Krudwig, 2009); and

(c) school psychology training programs continue to lack training in reporting evaluation results to parents, particularly when news is difficult to hear (Fallowfield & Jenkins, 2004; Frost, Rogers, O'Bryon, & Perry, 2010).

The challenge for "skillfully communicating news requires sensitivity, thoughtful wording, and an awareness of the potential effect on the recipients" (p. 198). Training in this area is sensible as the initial eligibility meeting is a setting where evaluation results are always shared; for some parents, this news is difficult to hear.

Many states require minimal, *if any,* course work in special education to earn an LEA representative's license or certificate (Kaye, 2002; Leone, Warnimont, & Zimmerman, 2009; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006). However, LEA representatives' express their desire for fundamental knowledge of special education, particularly regarding understanding procedural policies and practices (Collins & White, 2001; Davidson & Algozzine, 2002; Davidson & Gooden, 2001; DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006).

Training, would likely increase education professionals' knowledge of required procedural practices. Thus, the expectation is their ability to describe the required procedural practices, and either comply with a particular practice, or as an IEP team member, ensure another education professional completes the practice. This implication

supports the four conclusions: education and training may reduce the theory-to-practice gap; education and training would support education professionals with knowing, scribing, and verifying legally-binding documentation; education and training would support all professionals who are less informed and experienced; and education and training strengthens individual education professionals regarding their role and responsibilities and of the IEP teams role and responsibilities.

Lastly, I provide implications for future research.

1. The smaller districts exhibited increased compliance relative to the larger district regarding *Federal Register* (2006) requirements. This warrants an examination of the school and district demographics that may have contributed to this finding. For instance, what related features do smaller districts have that larger districts lack? What can larger districts learn from smaller districts?

2. Theories-of-action frame is useful for research involving individual participants. It was difficult to use for teams. I know of one other study, Moecker (1989) that used this frame for groups. Exploring the functional and practical use of this frame for group settings would contribute to the research base.

3. My study superficially used the theories-of-action frame. It would have been wise and helpful had I been prepared to explore education professionals' espoused theories with greater depth (e.g., personal thoughts, values, beliefs) as intended by Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978). Research could address education professionals' espoused theories (e.g., worldviews), and obtained richer, emic data.

4. Consistent with the theories-of-action frame, I utilized it as a diagnostic tool; it can also be used as a used for corrective action. A similar study could use the Double Loop corrective action tool to see if incongruences could be corrected to congruencies.

5. My interest was piqued regarding simple terminology. I repeatedly saw and struggled when I came across the referenced of parents as *equal* IEP team members and *equal* partners. Equal in what ways? I found no definition in the literature, in IDEA (2004), or the *Federal Register* (2006). I have professionally concluded parents have the same (equal) opportunity as education professionals to express their thoughts, opinions, ideas, and concerns. However, the term, equal, has tremendous potential for creating confusion and disagreement. While the term theoretically brings about cooperative and collaborative thought and action, it may bring discord. Research on terminology and language within the field of special education would be useful.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Letter to Director of Schools

Director, Name of School District   Date
Address & Phone

Dear Director _____,

   I am requesting your consideration to conduct a research study at _____.

My research interest pertains to decision-making practices during initial individual

education planning (IEP) team meetings for young children, preschool through

elementary school. Research shows partnered decision-making practices are tied to

increased student performance. This study will examine education professionals'

practices of team decision-making in initial IEP meetings. This research may prove

beneficial for building relations between parents and education professionals. I will be

conducting this research along with Dr. Trena Paulus, Associate Professor of

Instructional Technology at the University of Tennessee and Dr. Pamela Angelle,

Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at the University of Tennessee.

   I would like to meet with you or your designated representative to share more

details about the study. My contact information is listed below. Thank you for your

consideration. I look forward to sharing more about my study and the possibility of

_____ Elementary School's participation.

Sincerely,
Heather Stewart
University of Tennessee, Doctoral Candidate
hstewar4@vols.utk.edu

APPENDIX B

Letter to School Principals

From: Heather Stewart   Date
University of Tennessee Doctoral Candidate

Re: *Decision-Making Practices during Initial IEP Team Meetings*

Dear Principal,

Permission has been received from your *Director of Schools* to conduct research at

Elementary School. This study is designed to add to the understanding of the decision-

making practices occurring during initial eligibility special education meetings. To

achieve this purpose, I will:

1. Observe initial IEP team meetings;
2. Request research participants' responses on a questionnaire; and
3. Interview research participants to clarify and increase understanding of their role and participation in initial eligibility special education meetings.

Data Collection Procedures
Phase 1
During the initial phase of the study, I will observe initial eligibility meetings. During the observation I will take notes strictly for my research study; they will not be used for any other purposes. No recording devices will be used during IEP team meetings. All observational notes will be destroyed according to UT Institutional Research Board.

Phase 2
After the IEP meeting, participants will respond and submit answers to a questionnaire.

Phase 3
The third phase will include individual interviews with the administrator, special education teacher, and school psychologist who attended the eligibility meeting. Informed consent will be obtained from each interview participant. The interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed. All recordings and notes from the recordings will be destroyed according to UT's IRB procedures.

If you agree to participate, please confirm by returning this signed form by scanning and emailing this letter of confirmation to me at hstewar4@vols.utk.edu.

After I receive your written permission, I will be in touch with you to make arrangements for scheduling observations and interviews. I appreciate your willingness to participate in my research study. I will not interrupt instructional time. I will strive for efficiency so my time in your school is at a minimum. I will not share the participants' information with the other participants. Participants' information will be maintained in a manner to protect their identity.

Sincerely,

Heather Stewart
hstewar4@vols.utk.edu

APPENDIX C

Institutional Review Board Approval

THE UNIVERSITY *of* TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE
Office of Research & Engagement
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

1534 White Ave.
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697
fax 865-974-7400

March 13, 2014

IRB#: 9437 B

Title: Espoused beliefs and enacted practices: An exploration of partnered decision-making in special education eligibility meetings

Heather Stewart
Educational Psychology & Counseling
8877 Carriage House Way
Knoxville, TN 37923

Trena Paulus
Educational Psychology & Counseling
515 Bailey Education Complex
Campus - 3452

Your project listed above has been reviewed and granted IRB approval under expedited review.

This approval is good for a period ending one year from the date of this letter. Please make timely submission of renewal or prompt notification of project termination (see item #3 below).

Responsibilities of the investigator during the conduct of this project include the following:

1. To obtain prior approval from the Committee before instituting any changes in the project.

2. If signed consent forms are being obtained from subjects, they must be stored for at least three years following completion of the project.

3. To submit a Form D to report changes in the project or to report termination at 12-month or less intervals.

The Committee wishes you every success in your research endeavor. This office will send you a renewal notice (Form R) on the anniversary of your approval date.

Sincerely,

Brenda Lawson

Brenda Lawson
Compliances

Enclosure

Big Orange. Big Ideas.

APPENDIX D

Education Professionals' Informed Consent

APPENDIX F
Education Professionals' Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Espoused beliefs and enacted practices: An exploration of partnered decision-making in special education eligibility meetings

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study that will examine education professionals' interactions in initial eligibility meetings. Your participation in this study is voluntary. The results of this study will help education professionals with practices and procedures in IEP meetings

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Participation in this study entails the following. The researcher will observe and take hand-written field notes during one initial eligibility individual education planning meeting in which you are taking part. If you choose to withdraw your consent after data collection has begun, I will omit your data from my results and interpretive findings. Your decision to participate will have no bearing on your professional role or on the students being evaluated during the IEP meetings.

After the meeting you will receive an e-mail with a link to an anonymous online questionnaire via the University of Tennessee's web-based software, Qualtrics. This questionnaire should take no longer than one hour to complete and you are encouraged to complete this questionnaire within 24 hours of the observed IEP meeting.

Finally, you are invited to participate in a semi-structured interview which will last no longer than 30 minutes and will take place at a mutually convenient time and location. You will receive a $20 gift card at the conclusion of the interview.

RISKS

There are minimal risks to participating in this study. Real names of participants, school districts and locations will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect your identity. Questionnaires will be administered using the University of Tennessee's online survey program, Qualtrics, which ensures that all responses are anonymous. Observational field notes will be scanned and stored electronically and the hard copies will be destroyed.

_____ Participant's initials

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UTK EXPEDITED Approval:
MAR 1 4 2014 – MAR 1 4 2015

All interviews will be transcribed by a professional transcriber who will sign a confidentiality agreement. All real names will be replaced with pseudonyms. All data and consent forms will be destroyed three years after the conclusion of this study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study.

Data files (interview transcripts, observational field notes and questionnaires) will be stored electronically on a password-protected computer. No other persons have access to this computer. No other persons have access to my password and this password is unique and different from any other passwords that I use. The password is a combination of random upper and lower case letters, numerals, and symbols that has no meaningful or identifiable reference to me. If by remote chance, the laptop computer is lost or stolen, the password is such that others would not be able to gain access to any research data or other files.

While I will keep your information confidential, please note that I cannot ensure that others present during the IEP meeting will maintain confidentiality.

BENEFITS

There is no direct benefit to you. Findings from this study may facilitate partnered decision-making when making eligibility decisions for children with special needs.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study.

COMPENSATION

You will receive a $20 gift card for your participation in this study. You will receive the gift card after participating in the interview.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT

The University of Tennessee does not "automatically" reimburse subjects for medical claims or other compensation. If physical injury is suffered in the course of research, or for more information, please notify the investigator in charge Heather Stewart at hstewar4@utk.edu.

_____ Participant's initials

UTK EXPEDITED Approval:
MAR 1 4 2014 – MAR 1 4 2015

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Heather Stewart at hstewar4@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

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UTK EXPEDITED Approval:

MAR 1 4 2014 - MAR 1 4 2015

APPENDIX E

Institutional Review Board Continued Approval

THE UNIVERSITY *of* TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

Office of Research & Engagement
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

1534 White Ave.
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697
fax 865-974-7400

May 5, 2015

Heather Anne Stewart
UTK - Educational Psychology & Counseling

Re: UTK IRB-14-09437 B-XP
Study Title: Espoused beliefs and enacted practices: An exploration of partnered decision-making in special
education eligibility meetings

Dear Ms. Stewart:

The Administrative Section of the UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your application to
continue your previously approved project, referenced above. It has determined that your application is
eligible for **expedited** review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1). The IRB reviewed your renewal application and
determined that it does comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the
regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects. Therefore, this letter constitutes *reinstatement*
and approval of your renewal application. Approval of this study will be valid from May 5, 2015 to March 13,
2016.

In the event that subjects are to be recruited using solicitation materials, such as brochures, posters, web-based
advertisements, etc., these materials must receive prior approval of the IRB. Any revisions in the approved
application must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are
responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subject
or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, **re-approval** of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above.
You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior
written approval of the IRB.

Sincerely,

Colleen P. Gilrane

Colleen P. Gilrane, PhD
Chair
UTK Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX F

Parents' Informed Assent

Decision-Making Practices during Initial IEP Team Meetings

Research is being conducted by Heather Stewart, a doctoral candidate at the University of Tennessee working on an advanced degree in Educational Psychology. Her research fulfills two purposes:
1. The research requirement for graduate students seeking advanced degrees, and
2. Findings may be used to add to the literature base regarding decision-making practices in initial eligibility special education meetings.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the decision-making practices in initial eligibility meetings. ***Only meetings in which all team members give their written assent or consent are eligible for study.*** The phase of Ms. Stewart's data collection that will directly affect you is her physical presence during your child's initial eligibility meeting. During Ms. Stewart's observation, she will take notes for her use. When not referencing her data collection notes, they will be stored on her personal, password-protected laptop computer.

PARTICIPANTS' IN THE STUDY
The data, including but not limited to the primary investigator's observation field notes, will not have any identifying features; that is, no names of students, parents, or staff; and no naming of the school or school district. Although the research involves information about individual students, no students will be involved in the study. While parents are in the initial IEP team meetings, parents are not a focus of the study. No reference will be made, in oral or written reports, which could link parents or school personnel to the study.

RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks to any of the participants in this study. Participation is wholly voluntary. Participants may decline their participation at any time during the study. A participant's decision to participate or decline will not have any effect on the student, parent, or education professionals. The IEP process will naturally proceed without any risk or penalty.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the primary investigator, Heather Stewart at hstewar4@vols.utk.edu, or her research chair, John Peters, EdD at jpeters@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the University of Tennessee's Office of Research Compliance at (865) 974-3466.

PARENTS' RIGHT to STOP DATA COLLECTION

At any time during the meeting, if you wish to have the researcher, Ms. Stewart, stop her observation and data collection, you may make this request without penalty and without loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled.

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

PARENTS' INFORMED ASSENT FOR DATA COLLECTION

I have read the above information or it has been explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I received a copy of this form.

Parents' signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX G

Participating School and Community Demographics

District A: Community Demographics

Community Size	Household Income	Total # Schools	Total # Students	% Students with IEP	# Elementary Schools	# Schools Participating
62,132	$37,147	18	10,323	11.48	11	6

Source: Common Core of Public School Data 2011-2012 school year

District A: Participating Schools' Demographics

School	Grades	Total # Students	% Male	% Female	% of Student Race/Ethnicity*	% Free Reduced Lunch
A-1	K-5	274	53.65	46.35	66.42 White 23.72 Hispanic 4.38 Black 1.46 Asian/Hawaiian 0.00 Am Indian/Alaskan 4.01 Other	68.24
A-2	K-5	470	51.27	48.72	47.87 White 41.70 Hispanic 4.25 Black 0.85 Asian/Hawaiian 0.21 Am Indian/Alaskan 5.10 Other	90.85
A-3	K-5	550	50.91	49.09	48.91 White 38.72 Hispanic 6.00 Black 0.54 Asian/Hawaiian 0.36 Am Indian/Alaskan 5.45 Other	88.00
A-4	K-5	483	50.31	49.69	48.03 White 41.82 Hispanic 6.00 Black 0.00 Asian/Hawaiian 0.00 Am Indian/Alaskan 4.14 Other	83.02
A-5	PK-5	764	50.52	49.47	89.66 White 6.28 Hispanic 1.83 Black 0.13 Asian/Hawaiian 0.13 Am Indian/Alaskan 1.96 Other	52.74
A-6	K-5	460	53.69	46.30	40.65 White 40.65 Hispanic 6.08 Black 1.30 Asian/Hawaiian 0.00 Am Indian/Alaskan 11.30 Other	82.82

Source: Common Core of Public School Data 2013-2015 school year
Note: Census data from 2000 / Details may not add to totals

District B: Community Demographics

Community Size	Household Income	Total # Schools	Total # Students	% Students with IEP	# Elementary Schools	# Schools Participating
22,708	$34,148	9	3,658	12.76	5	1

Source: Common Core of Public School Data 2011-2012 school year

District B: Participating Schools' Demographics

School	Grades	Total # Students	% Male	% Female	% of Student Race/Ethnicity*	% Free Reduced Lunch
B-1	PK-12	618	50.97	49.02	98.22 White 1.45 Hispanic 0.00 Black 0.00 Asian/Hawaiian 0.00 Am Indian/Alaskan 0.32 Other	69.57

Source: Common Core of Public School Data 2011-2012 school year
*Note: Census data from 2000 / Details may not add to totals

District C: Community Demographics

Community Size	Household Income	Total # Schools	Total # Students	% Students with IEP	# Elementary Schools	# Schools Participating
27,500	$57,087	8	4,738	14.45	5	1

Source: Common Core of Public School Data 2011-2012 school year

District C: Participating Schools' Demographics

School	Grades	Total # Students	% Male	% Female	% of Student Race/Ethnicity*	% Free Reduced Lunch
C-1	K-4	438	47.03	52.96	74.88 White 6.39 Hispanic 10.95 Black 6.84 Asian/Hawaiian 0.45 Am Indian/Alaskan 0.45 Other	33.56

Source: Common Core of Public School Data 2011-2012 school year
*Note: Census data from 2000 / Details may not add to totals

APPENDIX H

Descriptions of Education Professionals

District A Education Professionals

District - School	LEA Representative	Special Education Teacher	School Psychologist
A-1	Male Caucasian Principal PhD	Female Caucasian Master's Degree	Female Caucasian PhD
A-2	Female Caucasian Assistant Principal PhD	Female Caucasian Master's Degree	Female Caucasian PhD
A-3	Female Caucasian Assistant Principal EdS	Female Caucasian Bachelor's Degree	Female Caucasian EdS
A-4	Male Caucasian Assistant Principal EdS	Female Caucasian Master's Degree	Male Caucasian EdS
A-5	Female Caucasian Assistant Principal EdS	Female Caucasian Bachelor's Degree	Female Caucasian PhD
A-6	Female Caucasian Assistant Principal PhD	Female Caucasian EdS	Female Caucasian PhD

District B Education Professionals

School	Local Education Agency Representative	Special Education Teacher	School Psychologist
B-1	Male Caucasian Assistant Principal Master's Degree	Female Caucasian Bachelor's Degree	Male Caucasian EdS

District C Education Professionals

School	Local Education Agency Representative	Special Education Teacher	School Psychologist
C-1	Female Caucasian Assistant Principal PhD	Female Caucasian Master's Degree	Female Caucasian EdS

APPENDIX I

Initial Eligibility Meeting Observation Form

Initial Eligibility Meeting Observation Form

1. Was the meeting notification sent in accordance with the *Federal Register of IDEA* (2006)?
   - Notification sent with at least 10 business days' notice? Yes No
     - If fewer than 10 days, was this waived with parent signature? Yes No
   - Was the date, time, and location of the meeting indicated? Yes No
   - Were the education professionals listed on the notification? Yes No
   - Was the **_purpose_** of the IEP meeting indicated? Yes No

2. Was a verbal statement made by at least one education professional regarding parents as members of the IEP team and/or the need for parents' active participation during the meeting? Yes No By whom? LEA, SPED, PSYC, Other

In general, what was stated?

_____

_____

3. Was the student identified with an educationally-related disability? Y N _____
4. For students identified with a disability, was there discussion regarding the disability's impact on the student's learning (e.g., acquiring/retention of skills: academics, social, motor, adaptive, behavioral)? Y N Who initiated discussion (LEA, SPED, PSYC, Parent, Other)?

In general, what was stated?

_____

_____

Was the continuum of special education services discussed? Y N

5. Did the IEP team determine the student was eligible for special education? Y N

Additional Information: _____

APPENDIX J

Web-based Questionnaire

Web-based Questionnaire

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1. According to the *Federal Register of IDEA* (2006), describe the content, purpose, and timeline for providing the IEP meeting notification document to parents.

2. Describe the primary purpose of the initial IEP eligibility meeting.

3. What procedures must occur to achieve the initial eligibility meeting's primary purpose?

4. Who is part of the initial IEP team and what are their respective responsibilities?

5. Describe the parents' role during the initial eligibility meeting.

6. How are parents informed of their role and responsibilities?

7. When special education is being considered by the IEP team, what must be discussed in order to determine special education eligibility?

8. Describe how you position (e.g., support, facilitate) parents as team decision-making partners.

APPENDIX K

Semi-structured Interview

Semi-structured Interview

---

1. According to the *Federal Register of IDEA* (2006), describe the content, purpose, and timeline for providing the IEP meeting notification document to parents.

2. Describe the primary purpose of the initial IEP eligibility meeting.

3. What procedures must occur to achieve the initial eligibility meeting's primary purpose?

4. Who is part of the initial IEP team and what are their respective responsibilities?

5. Describe the parents' role during the initial eligibility meeting.

6. How are parents informed of their role and responsibilities?

7. When special education is being considered by the IEP team, what must be discussed in order to determine special education eligibility?

8. Describe how you position (e.g., support, facilitate) parents as team decision-making partners.

APPENDIX L

Permission to Adapt Copyrighted Interactive Research Design

9-14-13
Heather:
You have my permission to adapt my model as you describe; the appropriate terms to use obviously depend on your audience. I have a student who's just finishing his dissertation on parents' views of the value of parent education centers in their participation in the IEP process; if you're interested in this, I'll forward his proposal to you when I get his permission. Joe

9-14-13
George Mason University, Fairfax Campus
West Building 2004 / 4400 University Drive / MS 6D2
Fairfax, VA 22030

Hello Dr. Maxwell:

I am a PhD Candidate at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, TN. I am writing my dissertation proposal and am preparing to orally defend on 10/01/13. The title of my qualitative study is, Exploration of parents as partners in special education eligibility decision-making. My research frame is your integrated and interactive research design found in the most recent Sage Publication (2013), *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Model, 3rd Edition*.

As I am using and citing your design by APA standards, I am seeking your permission to make an adaptation of the titles you have given to Components One and Five. I wish to reference Component One as Purpose of My Study (instead of Goals) and Component Five as Methods of Verification (instead of Validity). I wish to make this adaptation for use in my proposal and my subsequent dissertation, narratively and in figure form, while giving you proper copyright credit for your design. If you are willing for me to make this adaptation, I will acknowledge, APA style, your permission for my adaptation to your copyrighted design.

If you would like to ask questions or see a copy of my figure/proposal, I would be happy to share. Thanking you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Heather A. Stewart
Doctoral Candidate, University of Tennessee
Educational Psychology, Collaborative Learning
hstewar4@vols.utk.edu

APPENDIX M

Permission to Adapt Copyrighted Demographic Data Form

10/06/13
To: Stewart, Heather Anne
Subject: Re: permission to adapt dissertation form

Heather:
As of this date, I give you permission.
RRK

On Oct 6, 2013, at 3:06 PM, Stewart, Heather Anne wrote:
Richard Kretschmer, EdD
Teacher's College Building
2610 McMicken Cir, Cincinnati OH 45221

RE: Permission to modify Demographic Data Form

Dr. Kretschmer:
As indicated below, we have previously communicated regarding my efforts to contact
Dr. Apollos Harris. I have been unsuccessful in my efforts to contact him. As you served
as Dr. Harris' dissertation chair, I am seeking your permission to reference and modify
his Demographic Data Form (Appendix C) he used in his study. I will cite the original
source and subsequently indicate my adaptations. I am grateful for your consideration.
Please let me know if you have any concerns, questions, or comments.

Sincerely,
Heather A. Stewart
Doctoral Candidate / University of Tennessee
Educational Psychology / Collaborative Learning
hstewar4@vols.utk.edu

From: Stewart, Heather Anne
Sent: Saturday, September 28, 2013 3:38 PM
To: Kretschmer, Richard
Cc: Stewart, Heather Anne
Subject: RE: permission to adapt dissertation form

Dr. Kretschmer:
Thank you for your expedient response. I searched the Wilberforce University website.
The website is limited, and I did not find any reference to Apollos R. Harris, EdD. While
reviewing WU faculty e-mail addresses, I attempted to send him an e-mail at
aharris@wilberforce.edu; thus far, I have not received an "undeliverable" notice. I will

wait a few days. If I do not receive any word back from Dr. Harris, I will graciously accept your authorizing ability to grant me permission. I will be in touch.

Thank you,
Heather Stewart
hstewar4@vols.utk.edu

From: Kretschmer, Richard (kretscr) <kretscr@ucmail.uc.edu>
Sent: Saturday, September 28, 2013 1:38 PM
To: Stewart, Heather Anne
Subject: Re: permission to adapt dissertation form

Unfortunately, I do not have his e-mail address. I believe he is still employed at Wilberforce University in Ohio. If you cannot contact him, perhaps I could give you permission as his dissertation director.

Hoping this helps,
RRK

On Sep 28, 2013, at 1:03 PM, Stewart, Heather Anne wrote:

Richard Kretschmer, Ed.D.
Teacher's College Building
2610 McMicken Cir, Cincinnati OH 45221

RE: Apollos R. Harris, Ed.D. - e-mail address

Drs. Harris & Kretschmer:
My name is Heather Stewart, and I am a doctoral candidate from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. My dissertation research is entitled, Espoused beliefs and enacted practices: An exploration of parents as partners in special education eligibility decision making. I am utilizing J. A. Maxwell's (2005, 2013) Interactive Research Design with Argyris and Schön's (1974) conceptual frame, Theory-in-Action: Espoused Theory and Theory-in-Use. My research is examining education professionals' knowledge, beliefs, and enacted practices of team decision-making in initial IEP team meetings.

During my literature review, I found Dr. Harris's dissertation. As his research study is of comparable interest, I reviewed his work. I found specific value in his Demographic Data Form (Appendix C) and would like to adapt it for my use as part of my IEP Observation Form. Naturally, per APA reference, I would cite the original source as Dr. Harris's and subsequently indicate my adaptation to his form. I have attached a copy of how I perceive adapting his form for my datum collection needs.

I have attempted to locate Dr. Harris through an on-line search, but I have not been successful. As Dr. Kretschmer was Dr. Harris's dissertation committee chair, I am seeking Dr. Kretschmer's input for a forwarding e-mail address.

Thanking you in advance for your assistance,
Heather A. Stewart
Doctoral Candidate, University of Tennessee
Educational Psychology, Collaborative Learning
hstewar4@vols.utk.edu

VITA

Heather earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology at the University of South Dakota in 1985. She earned her Master of Arts degree in Counseling, Guidance and Personnel Services at the University of South Dakota in 1986. She earned her parochial elementary teaching certificate in 1995. She earned her Education Specialist degree in School Psychology at Valdosta State University in 2005. She earned her Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Psychology with a Concentration in Collaborative Learning at the University of Tennessee in 2015. She has earned and maintained her professional status as a nationally certified school psychologist in Georgia and Tennessee.

Heather's professional goal is to ensure all children who are suspected of having an educationally-related disability are comprehensively evaluated, appropriately identified, and meaningfully served. As an education professional, Heather strives to fulfill her responsibility by encouraging parents to be active and equalized participants in their children's special education decision-making processes. .