A Qualitative Study of the Effectiveness of Administrative Educational Placement Policy of Special Education Students with Special Attention to Social Reference Theory

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY
OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF
ADMINISTRATIVE EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENT POLICY
OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS
WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION
TO SOCIAL REFERENCE
THEORY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
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BY
SHARON CLOUSING

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VITA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This study attempts to examine the educational placement of special education students. When Public Law 94-142 was passed, educational placements of special education students became the sole responsibility of public schools and administrators. They now are arranging not only the school settings of regular education students, but also must determine what the educational setting will be for special education students.

Determining the appropriate educational setting for special education students has proven to be costly for many school administrators. Not only does the process of classifying a student cost a district in terms of time and money, but arriving at a consensus of opinion with the multi-disciplinary team, also has proven to be time consuming and financially costly. Added to the process is often the dissatisfaction with the decision by families and professionals, resulting in legal and court costs.

Administrators look to educational research to help them and their professional staff members make difficult decisions. They do not want to spend their time in court or add legal costs to their school budgets. The purpose of this research will be to provide administrators with
additional knowledge upon which to make decisions affecting the school setting of the special education student. Optimum development of the whole child requires that educators understand the effects of school organization upon self-concept as well as upon academic achievement, and administrators are in key decision-making roles regarding the organization of populations in schools.

Currently, there is a lack of consensus among professional educators in special education regarding the appropriate educational placement of a special education student. Integrating or mainstreaming special education students is given a high priority by some special education professionals. They theorize that integrating special education students in school will promote their integration into community life as adults. MacMillan (1982) wrote,

Because we are now trying normalization and mainstreaming as vehicles for treatment of retardation, it is critical that retarded individuals meet with acceptance in the community. As the problem now stands, they are probably not very well accepted and we don’t know how best to go about improving their image. We would think that increased exposure to retarded individuals would help to overcome the negative public stereotype of the retarded person as someone with severe disability and physical stigmata. But this has not necessarily been the case. Some experiments that increased contact between retarded and non-retarded people actually increased rejection of the retarded individuals. Education is another possibility, but some studies show that more educated people are more rejecting. Even among teachers, those who have been trained in dealing with mentally retarded persons may be no more positive toward them than general education teachers who have not had this training.
Administrators are confused. If they follow the pressures from special education professionals and place handicapped students in integrated settings, they often have unhappy families. If they place handicapped students where the parents ask them to be placed, they risk not following the "Least Restrictive Environment" clause of Public Law 94-142. Their questions then are:

Wasn't it the parents who wanted handicapped students integrated?

Wasn't the law a response to parental pressure?

Isn't integration with "normal" students supposed to help handicapped students?

Don't handicapped students want to be with the "normal" students?

This study attempts to find what parents of handicapped students desire and what the handicapped students themselves want as an educational environment. It will try to find what are the necessary elements in an environment for it to support healthy educational and emotional development.
THE NEED FOR THIS STUDY

The mission of education is to maximize the potential of students and the mission of special education is to maximize the potential of handicapped students. Research looks at how this mission is best achieved.

Federal legislation has mandated educating handicapped students in the "least restrictive environment" that is appropriate to the handicapped child. Interpretation of this mandate has been controversial and costly. Administrators attempt often to walk a fine line of meeting mandates, encouraging consensus of involved professionals and keeping parents of handicapped students satisfied. Administrators would like to know what is the best environment for a handicapped student.

The debate continues between integrating special education students with regular education students or segregating special education students into a separate environment. Barbara Ray (1985) attempted to measure the social position of the mainstreamed handicapped child. She found that handicapped children may be physically integrated into a classroom but be rejected or socially segregated by their non-handicapped peers. Jane Strobino (1986) studied parents' attitudes toward educational placements of their handicapped children. She found confusion in that parents
agreed with the conceptual/philosophical aspects of normalization, but not with the means by which this principle is implemented. This resulted in professionals working towards integration for the handicapped students and parents putting up barriers to the implementation of the integration process. The study found that there was something about integrating activities that parents of handicapped students did not like. The reality of the risk of exposure seemed to outweigh opportunities for growth and development in the minds of the parents. The study concluded that further policy regarding the handicapped would have to include the pragmatism of the parents and idealism of the professionals if movement towards integration on behalf of the handicapped was to occur.

Besides the confusion over placement issues, administrators also know that education is failing the very population that most needs its services. The U.S. Department of Education in 1988 reported that 312 students with learning disabilities drop out of school every day (Carnine, 1990, p.142). As the number of dropouts continues to grow in America, educational research needs to help decision makers better understand the problem so solutions can be determined.

We know humans are unique and different from each other. No one in the adult world pretends that workers all
have the same ability. It could be argued that workers are not even integrated. Factory workers work together. Managers and administrators work together. Yet, as Delpit (1988) states,

They (my colleagues) seem to believe that if we accept and encourage diversity within classrooms of children, then diversity will automatically be accepted at gate keeping points. I believe that will never happen. What will happen is that the students who reach the gate keeping points will understand that they have been lied to and will react accordingly. (p. 292).

Finally, the need for this study is based on the premise that peace is needed in the educational community. Resources are being drained from the educational process by controversies over where to teach which students. The quest for understanding deserves effort, rather than the quest for policy and control.
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perceptions of handicapped students and their parents regarding the segregated educational setting they have chosen for placement. Administrators react to and follow policy. Sweeping changes in policy and practices emerged with the passage of Public Law 94-142. However, application of these policies concerns parents.

Ideally, change would follow research and be founded on empirical finds. However, change actually results from social-political concerns, and most policy decisions precede rather than follow research (Keogh, 1990). Changes contained in Public Law 94-142 emerged from civil rights issues and had a constitutional rather than an empirical foundation. Now, policies resulting from Public Law 94-142 are being put into practice. This study is an effort to bridge the gap between policy and practice; to link research to social issues.

Parents of handicapped children are concerned about the vulnerability of their children. A number of studies have reported that mentally retarded and learning disabled children in regular school placements are rejected by their peers (Goodman, Gottleib and Harrison, 1972; Gottleib and Budoff, 1972, Bryan, 1974). Additional studies of learning
disabled children in interactions with non-disabled children indicate that they play cooperative but unassertive roles and will go along with action of non-disabled students, even if they know the actions are wrong (Bryan, Donahue and Pearl, 1981; Bryan, Donahue, Pearl and Sturm, 1981). Since friendship patterns are fairly stable across time (Bryan 1976), this following of known antisocial behaviors is a major concern to educators and parents.

Parents of handicapped children are also very concerned about their futures as adults. Since learning disabled adolescents experience significant problems in social perception and social adjustment, their future success in life could be hindered more by poor social skills than by academic problems (Jackson, 1987). Parents want a happy school life for their children where their social skills are able to develop and their self-acceptance strengthened. While there is controversy over appropriate educational placement, the current trend is towards integration (Stainback, 1988). This study will give voice to participants in special education. Qualitative research is well suited to exploring personal thoughts, feelings and meanings people give events in their lives. It can provide the empirical finds needed to support or redirect educational trends.
DESCRIPTION OF A SEGREGATED SETTING FOR THE HANDICAPPED

Individualized special education is provided to mentally and/or physically handicapped students on a 36 acre campus located in a suburb southwest of Chicago. This segregated facility was started 43 years ago by parents of handicapped students prior to legislation mandating services for their children.

At that time, mainstreaming was not a concept impacting on such a facility. The parents were interested in educating their handicapped children, thus enhancing their lives. As special education developed, this facility often gave leadership to surrounding public school districts and provided services to children so unique and complex that there were not appropriate programs for them in the public settings.

As integrating special education children became popular, this facility struggled with its own future. Presently, it has started off-campus programs in local schools where some of the higher functioning students are being educated with their chronological age peers.

However, even as the push to integrate impacts policy decisions of the current Board of Trustees, there is a sense of something good that happens on the campus for handicapped students. There is a joy in their own school setting that
is obvious to both visitors and inhabitants of these buildings that is often remarked upon. There is a joy in their school years and school activities that parents wish all of their children to experience, and it is especially heartening when handicapped students too can relish school years and school memories. Consequently, direction for integrating the currently segregated student body, is being considered carefully, and this research will be impacting future decisions.

The campus complex consists of 14 buildings. The large school building is wheelchair accessible and, therefore, is a one story building that spreads out in many directions. It houses administration offices, conference rooms, classrooms, therapy rooms, gym-auditorium, indoor swimming pool, library, audio-visual/music room, cafeteria, support personnel offices and a supportive working environment or workshop. The dormitory houses up to 46 students and provides space for social service offices. Additional buildings are for adult services, maintenance and staff housing.

The campus setting allows space for 3 large playgrounds with wheelchair accessible equipment, a softball field and soccer field. The walks and wooded area are inviting for classes and for teachers working a student away from disruptive behavior patterns.
While individual educational programs are carried out within each classroom, participation in groups and community are encouraged and practiced. Music, art and sport activities give opportunities to participate with many regular education students through games, programs and competitions. Preparing students for future living and working environments is a top priority and realistically these environments will not be segregated from the normal populations.

The campus is a segregated facility, but it is not segregated from the community. The students regularly use public transportation, shop in and visit local stores and restaurants and are a vital part of the worshipping congregation at the local church. The community and local schools have been supportive of the facility and future growth is even encouraged.
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Special education, in the public sector, has been compliance-driven. First, Public Law 94-142 mandated services for handicapped students. Then in November of 1986, the assistant secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), Madeline Will, presented a paper to Secretary of Education William J. Bennett, entitled, "Educating Students with Learning Problems: A Shared Responsibility" (Will, 1986). The paper called for the field's "best thinking" and the "full and free exchange of ideas and creative responses" regarding "additional strategies for improving the education of students with learning problems" in the regular education setting. This call by the Assistant Secretary has been characterized as the "General Education Initiative" and the response from the special education community to this initiative has been swift, direct, and in some cases, contentious (Carnine & Kameenui, 1990).

The "General Education Initiative" outlined four main problems with special education:

1. A dual system for special and regular education.
2. Fragmented services to special education students.
3. Segregation from non-handicapped peers.
4. The adversarial climate over placement of special education students.

Will's recommended solutions for these problems was for general educators to take responsibility for handicapped students rather than placing them in special classes with teachers trained to meet their special educational needs. She would give these general educators additional support in the way of employing new educational approaches, such as cooperative learning, curriculum-based assessment and personalized curricula.

As the "General Education Initiative" continues to encourage integration of handicapped students with their non-handicapped peers, parents of handicapped students seem to be fighting for placements where their children can be happy and will be comfortable enough to learn. The professional literature also expresses concern that many mainstreamed children are being socially rejected or isolated by their non-handicapped peers in the regular classroom (Fox, 1989).

So, while mainstreaming may allow increased social contact between non-handicapped and handicapped children, this contact does not ensure social acceptance of handicapped children. In fact, many parents fear the effects of mainstreaming upon their handicapped child and
will fight lengthy legal battles to place their child in a segregated setting.

The problem then in special education is that legal and therefore professional forces are pushing for integrated services, while parents and other professionals seem to prefer serving these children in segregated facilities. Burton Blatt, in his book *The Conquest of Mental Retardation*, shared his view that freedom should be defined primarily in terms of the individual's wants and needs, and not in terms of the professional's formulas and preferences. The controversy rages, while the educators attempt to retain flexibility in meeting the needs of children.
DEFINITION OF TERMS

Integration = Handicapped and non-handicapped students educated in the same school and with same-age peers.

Segregation = Handicapped students educated in a separate school that does not educate non-handicapped students.

LD = Students who are Learning Disabled.
EMH = Students who are Educable with Mental Handicaps.
TMH = Students who are Trainable with Mental Handicaps.
PH = Students who have Physical Handicaps.
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to interviews with students educated at a segregated, special education facility and their parents. The students are between the ages of 9 and 19 and are classified as Learning Disabled (LD), Educable with Mental Handicaps (EMH) and Trainable with Mental Handicaps (TMH). The special education school is on a self-contained campus where related services of physical/occupational therapy and speech/language therapy are provided. Extra curricular activities such as art, music and sports are also provided and encouraged. All of these students have been in this facility for at least one year and not longer than five years.

This facility was chosen for the study because it represents segregated facilities which educate handicapped students; it has both a day and residential program; it is North Centrally Accredited; it is licensed by the Department of Mental Health (DMH), the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). This facility is sought by parents both from Illinois and outside of Illinois. It is 43 years old and existed prior to Public Law 94-142.

The interviewed parents were very involved in the placement of their children in this facility and a child is
seldom removed by their family or funding agency before graduating at age 21. The emotional health of each student is a high priority at this facility, and therefore the study is limited to this facility. Any attempt to apply these findings to all segregated special education facilities would be an error of over-generalization. Although the findings of this study may encourage further research and have far reaching application, the conclusions are limited to those supported by the actual data.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature reviewed for this study is divided into three sections. The social status of handicapped students in educational placements is discussed in the first section. The second section reviews Festinger's social relevance theory. The third section deals with the choice of using qualitative research methods.

SECTION ONE

(A) SOCIAL STATUS OF HANDICAPPED STUDENTS IN EDUCATIONAL PLACEMENTS

Public Law 94-142 impacted the education of handicapped students. Prior to the passage of this law, special educational services were offered at the desire of the local school councils if at all, or were created by groups of parents. Due to that history, many private facilities for handicapped students were built.

After PL 94-142, handicapped students could no longer be rejected by any public school district and were entitled to educational services, regardless of their handicap. At first, many of the parent-built private agencies were used by the public school districts while they attempted to build their own programs for the handicapped. Following the
direction laid out by PL 94-142, school districts attempted
to build programs for the handicapped in the least
restrictive atmosphere possible, trying to integrate the
handicapped students with appropriate chronologically aged
peers. In doing this, districts met resistance from parents
of handicapped students, who desired to keep their children
in segregated facilities.

Research regarding parental resistance surfaced common
areas of anxiety. Parents were concerned with (1)
mistreatment of handicapped by non-handicapped students,
(2) isolation within the regular school, (3) loss of related
services, and (4) the quality of the educational program
(McDonnell, 1987). While parents were found to agree with
the conceptual aspects of normalization, they did not with
the means by which the principle was implemented; there was
something about the normalization activities that parents
did not like. Jane Stroebino (1986) in her research on
parents’ attitudes regarding normalization again found
parents first concern was the reality of risk of exposure
of their already vulnerable children which for them
outweighed the opportunities for their ongoing growth and
development.

Parents however, are not the only people concerned
about the appropriateness of integration for the
handicapped. Stainback (1988) researched opinion of special
education professionals. They gave three main reasons for their hesitation regarding integration. First, they felt that regular school personnel are not trained sufficiently to work with handicapped students. Second, vulnerability of the handicapped students was again cited with resulting self-concept breakdown. Third, the professionals felt that medical and related services needed by this population were difficult to provide well in integrated school settings.

Stainback went on to research superintendents regarding the controversial issue of integrating or segregating special education students, since the superintendents are in key decision making roles in the schools. He found that approximately 50% of the superintendents surveyed agreed with integration and an equal amount of the superintendents disagreed with integration or were uncertain. This survey then demonstrates the lack of consensus regarding placement decisions for handicapped students which results in lack of leadership regarding this issue for parents and communities.
MaHeady, Harper and Sainato (1987) reviewed data bases regarding mentally handicapped students' problems in interpersonal relationships. They found that mentally handicapped students are: (a) rejected and/or ignored more often than their non-disabled peers by other students and teachers, (b) rated lower than their non-disabled classmates in sociometric status, (c) liked less than their non-disabled peers by fellow classmates, parents, and even complete strangers, and (d) are the recipients of more negative social encounters when only physically integrated into regular classrooms. They summarized their findings by saying that mentally handicapped students experience more difficulty interpreting social cues than their non-disabled counterparts which leads to their problems in interpersonal relationships.

Riester and Bessette (1986) also reviewed literature regarding peer interactions, since they felt that peers are "crucial and influential in determining a child's self-concept." They found numerous studies that demonstrated the negative reactions of non-handicapped children when they came in contact with handicapped children. They concluded that a curriculum of directed activities needed to be
developed which would sensitize the normal population to the handicapped students prior to integrating them.

Stone and LaGreca (1990) studied the social status of learning disabled (LD) children. They found LD children to be disproportionately over represented in the rejected and neglected sociometric groups and under represented in the popular and average groups. The LD children received lower play ratings, lower liking scores and higher disliking scores than the non-LD children.

Taylor, Asher and Williams (1987) studied the social adaptation of mainstreamed retarded children. Their literature search indicated that "the most distinctive feature of the mainstreamed retarded child's behavior appears to be a generally low rate of social interaction with other children." Their own observations of peer interactions concluded that "retarded children's difficulties in interacting successfully with higher functioning students leads to a pattern of avoidant behavior." They also found the retarded reported significantly more dissatisfaction and anxiety about their peer relations.
A study on peer popularity by Bryan (1976) concluded that learning disabled children were more likely to be rejected and less likely to be accepted by peers. Further, even when classroom composition was changed significantly, the sociometric studies found "considerable reliability to acceptance and rejection patterns among children." He concluded that children who tend to be popular or rejected maintained their social status even though their classmates change. "Stability in friendship patterns suggests that children have pretty definite ideas as to what they may or may not like in other children."

Fox (1989) also studied peer acceptance and found that although mainstreaming allowed for increased social contact between non-handicapped and handicapped students, it did not change the fact that many mainstreamed handicapped students were rejected or isolated by their non-handicapped peers. Even when teacher intervention was structured to aid social integration, social status could be maintained possibly, but could not be increased. Without structured intervention, teachers could anticipate a drop in children's acceptance by non-handicapped peers.

Yehezkel (1984) studied the psychological price of grouping students in educational placements. He found the
self-concept to be mediated by a comparative process, with the self-concept of the weaker student dropping in integrated settings while the self-concept of the stronger student rising. He also found that as the students became older, a wider social context of school and community became more important in their personal comparative process. As the strength of the self-concept varied in relation to the environment, so too did academic motivation. Frustration arising from perceived recurring lack of success by weak students in competitive environments lead to a negative effect on both self-image and motivation.
In 1980, MacMillan and Morrison found concern regarding educating handicapped students in regular public schools. In their review of the literature, they found that handicapped students were "less frequently selected as friends and more often rejected than are their non-handicapped peers in the regular grades." They also found that segregated handicapped students "were rated higher by non-handicapped children than are the integrated handicapped students with whom the non-handicapped children have had more contact." The literature attempted to explain the findings with the hypotheses that "the exposure of the mildly handicapped to their non-handicapped peers (when integrated) permits handicapped children to exhibit academic incompetence and inappropriate behavior, thereby causing them to be less accepted." Also, MacMillan and Morrison studied the contribution of cognitive competence and misbehavior to social acceptance of handicapped students. They found that for both acceptance and rejection, cognition was the best predictor. The concept of mutuality as a necessary base to acceptance and friendship began to be prominent in the studies on handicapped students.

In 1985, Barbara Ray also entered the debate regarding mainstreaming of handicapped students. When she reviewed
the literature, she found that integrating handicapped students into regular classrooms "provided no guarantee that social mainstreaming was occurring." Instead, she found that "handicapped children may be physically integrated into a classroom, but be rejected or socially segregated by their non-handicapped peers." She found that most of these studies had relied only on sociometric techniques, while her study added teacher ratings and direct observations. The results of her study are (a) handicapped children are viewed as less socially acceptable by both teachers and peers, but (b) do not differ from their non-handicapped peers in actual amounts of positive and negative social interaction. She further concluded that increasing frequency of interaction between handicapped and non-handicapped alone would not aid acceptance of the handicapped, but that teaching and developing the social skills of the handicapped would also be necessary.

In 1986, Angela Taylor presented a paper at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association on The Loneliness, Goal Orientation, And Sociometric Status Of Mildly Retarded Children's Adaptation To the Mainstream Classroom. In this paper, she concluded that mainstreaming will not promote social competence and peer acceptance of retarded students. She had found that "retarded children were lower in peer status, more shy and withdrawn, less
socially skilled, more lonely and more avoidant in their goals." Her offered solutions were programs of intensive social intervention plus environmental manipulations, such as cooperative groupings, with direct social skills training for the retarded students.

Another writer who feels integration must be based on mutuality is Ben Bahan. He writes in the 1987 Gallaudet Alumni Newsletter that he "thought" he was integrated in the first few years of schooling. Then he transferred to a segregated school facility where he discovered he could be integrated on many more levels: physical, social, mental and spiritual. He also draws the conclusion that if the rest of the world is segregated, the schools should not present an artificial picture of integration.

In 1987, William and Susan Stainback researched friendships in the lives of the retarded. They found parents who argued that friendships were critical for their retarded children. These parents ranked friendships as more important to happiness and quality of life than competence in functional skills, such as toileting, dressing, bus riding or grocery shopping. They focused their study on the skills necessary to maintain a friendship. Friendship was defined by the Stainbacks as "reciprocal liking and behavioral involvement between two or more people." They concluded that friendship skills could be taught, but that
these skills were subtle and complex, demanding practice and opportunities.

Fiedler and Simpson (1987) tested curricular approaches for influencing students' attitudes toward handicapped peers. They found that with the use of curricula, educators could positively modify perceptions of the handicapped. They cautioned, however, that both regular and special education teachers need to focus on such curricula in order for the handicapped to be accepted and become part of the school.

Fox (1989) shared the concern he found in the professional literature regarding mainstreamed handicapped children feeling rejected or isolated by their non-handicapped peers in the regular classroom (i.e., Erickson & Omark, 1980; Holinger, 1987; Parish, Baker, Arheart, and Adamchak, 1980; Sabornie & Kauffman, 1985). In looking for resolutions, Fox paired non-handicapped with handicapped peers. After the eight-week study, Fox concluded (1) that teachers would need to perform some intervention in order for handicapped students to be integrated, and (2) the attention would serve to maintain or present a decrease in status, but would not increase status.

White in January of 1990 wrote on deaf education for the Deaf Counselling, Advocacy and Referral Agency (DCARA) News. He pointed out that "mainstreaming seems to guarantee
the emergence of a deaf adult with serious doubts about himself - doubts he won't even recognize until much later because he will have no basis for comparison. Without the residential school experience of living and competing in an environment where he can participate in all things as equal, how can the deaf youngster believe that his own skills will ever be equal to the challenges of the day?" Participation, mutuality, reciprocal involvement appear basic to a feeling of acceptance.
In 1982, Donald MacMillan reviewed, in the second edition of his book, *Mental Retardation In School And Society*, studies on public attitudes toward the retarded. He found that women expressed more favorable attitudes toward the retarded than men (Harasymiw, 1971), that younger subjects held more positive attitudes than do older subjects (Gottwald, 1970; Hollinger & Jones, 1970), that lower social class individuals held more favorable attitudes than do middle or upper class individuals (Gottlieb, 1975) and that additional contact with the retarded does not foster more positive attitudes toward the retarded (Phelps, 1965). MacMillan also reviewed studies on peer attitudes toward the retarded. One study (Heber, 1956) found that when low-IQ children remained in regular grades, they had lower social status than higher IQ children. Another study (Christophos & Renz, 1969) concluded that integrated retarded students tended to be more rejected by non-retarded peers than are retarded children segregated in special classes. Meyerowitz (1967) found retarded children isolated socially and concluded that the lack of acceptance was independent of the educational placement of the retarded child.

MacMillan also sought out attempts to improve the peer status of the handicapped. He found that it was a difficult
task for a teacher to structure activities so that retarded students were an integral part of the group. He also sadly noted that any improvement in social status for the handicapped during experimental involvement quickly faded when artificial supports were removed. MacMillan summarized his review of the above studies by stating that students placed in appropriate educational placements according to their disability actually raised their self-concept. They now "looked better" in comparison to their classmates. He found some evidence that those students given special educational help and placements actually had a slight edge over people of similarly low IQ who were never given appropriate help.

In 1983, Mary Hannah and Susan Pliner published an article reviewing research findings related to teacher attitudes toward handicapped students. They found that in general, interactions between handicapped and non-handicapped were tense and constrained and that teachers tended to avoid public interactions with handicapped students. They found in their research that elementary teachers were more willing to try a handicapped student in their classroom than a secondary teacher; that teachers needed to have confidence regarding teaching skills necessary to the task of specialized teaching. However, even with support and skill training, the authors found that
teachers were not positive in their attitude toward the handicapped, but rather had negative beliefs about and feelings toward these children.

In 1986, Taylor, Asher and Williams assessed the social adaptation of mainstreamed mildly retarded children. The results of their study concluded that "mildly retarded children were quite rejected by their peers, and compared to non-retarded classmates, they reported significantly more dissatisfaction and anxiety about their peer relations." The authors further concluded that the retarded students' interactions showed an avoidant behavioral style which resulted in the children's interpersonal difficulties. Again, skill training for the retarded students was suggested, prior to integrating retarded students with non-retarded students. From 1986 on, artificial social supports appear in the literature as a needed component in any integrative attempt.

In 1987, Cindy Carlson researched social competence of learning disabled (LD) children as a result of development. In reviewing literature for this study, the author found that LD children were a "population at risk for poor interpersonal relations." They were found to be "less popular and more rejected by peers than non-disabled children." This resulted in the LD population selecting strategies which were "less normative, less pro-social, less
effective at solving problems, less relationship enhancing, and in conflict situations, more aggressive than popular peers." Carlson studied the LD students' interpersonal goals and strategies. She found that LD children approach peer conflict as a win-lose situation; their strategic approach to conflict reflected dominance or submission rather than integration of self and other behavior changes. The author further concluded "numerous cognitive and affective mediators influenced LD’s choice of less effectant goals in difficult interpersonal interactions." She listed (1) lower social self-concepts, (2) more external locus of control orientations, (3) higher anxiety, and (4) lower expectancies for success in personal interaction. The author encouraged future efforts to be put towards helping LD’s to develop mature goals and strategies for socializing, once again confirming that handicapped students are in need of external skill development and training to integrate socially.

In 1988, Cardell and Parmar published an article on their study of teachers' attitudes towards handicapped students. They found that LD students were viewed by their teachers as "less attentive, less able to organize themselves, less able to cope with new situations and less able to complete assignments. Additionally, they were seen as more frequently off task and more distractable than non-
LD children." The authors wrote that the results of their study left little doubt that the behavioral style of LD students is viewed negatively. They encouraged pre- and in-service training programs for teachers to help them produce a range of educational practices.

Leyser also in 1988 agreed with Cardell and Parmar and found that handicapped students received more negative criticism from teachers. This author concluded in a study on teachers' attitudes that there needed to be better pre- and in-service teacher education programs, providing intensive training for regular educators in the areas of classroom management and effective instruction. Also in 1988, Baum, Duffelmeyer and Geelan published a research brief on their survey conducted to determine the prevalence of social dysfunction among students with learning disabilities as perceived by resource teachers. In preparing for this survey, they found much of recent research reporting learning disabled students to be socially unaccepted, rejected, or isolated in comparison with their non-handicapped peers. The authors used a 12 item survey instrument to determine demographic characteristics of the 500 resource teachers randomly selected for a population of 1,909 resource teachers in Iowa.
The survey elicited information about students with learning disabilities. They found that 38% of LD students were perceived by their special education teachers as manifesting deficits in social functioning. They also found consistency of social dysfunction at the elementary, junior high and senior high levels suggesting that this problem is not being addressed and ameliorated in younger students with learning disabilities.

The authors suggested the following results from their study:

1. Nearly two-thirds of the students identified as learning disabled do not manifest deficits in social skills.

2. Resource teachers are clearly aware of the need for social skills in interventions for some of their students with learning disabilities, but they and other staff members are reluctant to prioritize social skill goals at the expense of academic goals.

3. If resource teachers are to be the persons designated to provide social skill interventions, training institutions must consider expanding their curricula to include specific training in social skill inventions.

Another researcher calling for an active program of social skills to be taught to the mentally handicapped was Luftig in 1988. He assessed the loneliness and isolation of mentally retarded students, finding that on a 5 point Likert-type loneliness scale, the retarded reported significantly more loneliness and isolation than did their
non-retarded counterparts. This author also discussed that at one time it was hoped that mainstreaming would increase social interaction of the retarded. However, despite providing more opportunities for retarded children to interact with non-handicapped children, mainstreaming has not reduced their social isolation (Vaugh, Ridley, & Cox, 1983). The authors propose "coaching" for the handicapped. "Coaching allows for a conceptual framework that provides a model for behavior, creates opportunities for controlled yet spontaneous application of learned strategies and provides immediate feedback as to the adequacy of the behavior utilized (Oden, 1986)." As the authors proposed social skill interventions in the form of "coaching," they concluded their research brief wondering about the effectiveness of social skill training with mentally retarded learners. A reader of all this literature begins to wonder why these researchers do not look more closely at alternative settings rather than trying to find ways to "make" mainstreaming of the handicapped work.

In 1989, still another researcher looked at why many mainstreamed children are being socially rejected or isolated by their non-handicapped peers in the regular classroom. Fox (1989) reviewed mainstreaming in the literature and found sufficient evidence to demonstrate that disabled children are more often socially rejected by their
peers than are non-handicapped children (Bryan, 1974; Bryan & Perlmutter, 1979; Bryan & Sherman, 1980; Gottlieb & Budoff, 1973; Gottlieb, Cohen & Goldstein, 1974; Gresham & Reschly, 1988; Perlmutter & Bryan, 1984; Sabornie & Kauffman, 1985). The author felt it was important, therefore, to examine instructional programs as they influenced the academic and social status of mainstreamed children. It was found that intervention is necessary to integrate handicapped students, but that the attention will only maintain or prevent a decrease in status, and will not increase status.

By 1990, the literature was assuming that social skill training was necessary for the handicapped to be integrated into regular education settings. A variety of social skills training programs designed to remediate deficits assumed to be inherent in the child appeared. Madge, Affleck and Lowenbraun (1990) studied the social effects of integrated classrooms and found that the social skills training programs had failed to generalize to the regular class setting or to improve the status of the handicapped student. The authors studied the difference class placement made to handicapped students. They studied handicapped students in regular education classes and handicapped students pulled out to resource rooms for additional help. They found that the two different ways of helping handicapped students did
not make any difference in the social status of the handicapped students. The handicapped students were still less accepted by regular education students regardless of the way additional educational help was offered. They also found that handicapped students preferred other handicapped students as peers when given choice, even though they now had more social contact with regular education students. They summarized their study by saying, "The high frequency of lower status nominations indicates that social problems related to learning disabilities are not alleviated by simply placing a child with a learning disability in a fully integrated program." Their thoughts for further research were towards finding out what parents and handicapped students feel about various special education placement options.

Waggoner and Wilgosh (1990) did look at families of handicapped students. Many themes emerged from their work, but one of those themes was social concern for the handicapped student. Parents felt their children were embarrassed about their disabilities and hesitated to be with same age peers. One mother was quoted as saying about her handicapped son, "He refused to go near children his
age, because he felt embarrassed about himself and ashamed. He's just begun to get a little bit better, but he doesn't pick up social cues."

These studies all address the difficulties handicapped students have in finding acceptance. That concept seems to be so well accepted, it is hardly debated in current literature. Rather, the literature turns towards adjusting the student by adding social skill training to their education. Some researchers question various educational environments, but most focus on doing something to, for or with the handicapped student. The handicapped student must fit, must change, must learn. Doesn't it seem odd to educators that a handicapped student who is already struggling to acquire knowledge must at the same time be cognitively working on self to develop social skills?
Focus on social skill development for handicapped students was found in the literature already in 1984. Researchers, Selman and Demorest, had observed children's interpersonal negotiation strategies. They found that unpopular children were less skillful than peers in situations involving making friends. These children offered only negative and aggressive solutions in conflict situations; they used only vague interactive strategies or those appealing to authority when making and maintaining friendships. The researchers concluded after their observations that social-cognitive competence deficits were operating to limit behavioral effectiveness.

These researchers also categorized interactive strategies according to age and social-cognitive developmental stages. They found again that the use of developmentally advanced behavioral strategies was significantly lower for unpopular children, suggesting relationship of cognitive ability to sophistication of interactive strategies. For the cognitively handicapped student, interactive strategies will be developmentally delayed causing difficulty with same age peers. The researchers further suggested that growth in the area of social competence is not "simply movement from low to high
levels, but rather a simultaneously upward and inward balanced movement." Social perception deficits now were being recognized along with the risk that handicapped students would suffer in their interpersonal relationships.

As stated in the section on social difficulties, MaHeady, Harper and Sainato (1987) also looked at social perception deficits. Their clinical observations of handicapped students' social problems led them to conclude that handicapped children are "(a) rejected and/or ignored more often than their non-disabled peers by other students and teachers, (b) rated lower than their non-disabled classmates in sociometric status, (c) liked less than their non-disabled peers by fellow classmates, parents and even complete strangers, and (d) the recipients of more negative social encounters when only physically integrated into regular classrooms." In continuing to look at social perception deficits, these researchers concluded that there is no one cause of deficient interpersonal functioning. They suggested that future research should address a broader perspective than that of solely evaluating the child in isolation. They began to pull out environmentally maintained social problems as well as social skill deficits and social perception deficits. They asked that the social perception construct reflect both the situational variability and the receptive and expressive components.
inherent in the process. Their emphasis on the environment as well as the child was encouraging.

In 1987, James Dudley wrote for Social Work regarding the deinstitutionalization movement. While the focus has been on physical integration, Mr. Dudley pleaded for attention to be given also to social integration. He argued strongly for the people who are labeled as mentally retarded to have a say in the movements in which they would be central participants. He particularly asked for group approaches to be emphasized over individual approaches so that clients with common problems could help each other. He also asked for a more open approach to be used in discussing future plans for the handicapped and thus avoiding the usual "conspiracy of silence." While not an article referring to research conducted, Mr. Dudley does have an everyday working knowledge of dealing with the problems of the handicapped and wants to maintain social support for the handicapped as the movement toward integrating them into American life continues.

Jackson, Enright and Murdock in 1987 tried to distinguish between social difficulties of the handicapped due to perception versus social difficulties of the handicapped due to developmental lag. They theorized that, if due to perceptual deficits, additional training may help, but the deficit would be part of their learning mode and
thus always a difficulty for them in life. If the social difficulties were due to developmental lag, then early intervention plus training would help with the expectation that the handicapped could catch up as adults. In researching the perceptual deficit theory, the authors concluded that this ability could be strengthened, but differences between handicapped and non-handicapped students remained the same. In looking at the developmental lag theory, they found additional difficulties in that the handicapped often did not have access to the same activities as the non-handicapped. For instance, the handicapped often could not qualify for participation in extracurricular activities such as athletics, special interest groups, etc. This prevented the handicapped from having the exact social experiences necessary to develop their social skills. They concluded that schools should concentrate on strengthening the social perception skills of the handicapped, hoping to shorten the developmental lags. The researchers did make a plea for attention to be paid to the social difficulties of the handicapped as they felt social difficulties could potentially be more of a hindrance to success in life than even academic problems.
One final major theme from the literature should be given attention. Two authors, both mentioned before, came to the conclusion that similar intellectual ability levels are a factor in the mutuality basic to friendship.

MacMillan and Morrison already in 1980 wrote for the *Journal Of Educational Psychology* that cognition was the best predictor for both acceptance and rejection by peers and teachers of handicapped students. They had studied the contributions of cognitive competence and misbehavior on the sociometric status of handicapped students. Teachers and peers were asked to rate target students who were classified as handicapped. Cognition was the best predictor of social acceptance. These researchers warned educators in this article to be cautious when mainstreaming handicapped students fearing that social rejection could make school even less comfortable for them.

Selman and Demorest (1984) studied friendship difficulties of children. They found "social-cognitive competence deficits operating to limit behavioral effectiveness." Children's repertoires of interpersonal strategies were found to match their cognitive levels and these authors suggested that aiding growth in social competence would result in more emotional maturity.
The issue of educational placement, while mentioned, was not the focus of these researchers. Their interest was in understanding handicapped students' social difficulties. The focus was on the handicapped student rather than on the environment.
In 1954, Leon Festinger published a paper, "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes." In this paper, he extended his previous theory of opinion influence processes in social groups to include the appraisal and evaluation of abilities. Since this research is looking at the influence abilities has on social groupings, most of the discussion will focus on Festinger's findings regarding abilities rather than the findings regarding opinion.

The first hypothesis Festinger purported was that there exists, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and his abilities. Abilities were discussed as being those abilities which were manifested through performance and which could be clearly ordered, that is, furnished an objective reality dependent on actual comparison of one's performance with the performance of others. An example of this type of ability would be the student comparing his or her running speed to another student's running speed. The implication of this hypothesis then is that we would expect to observe behavior demonstrating desire to compare abilities.

Festinger's second hypothesis was that to the extent that objective, non-social means are not available, people
evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparison respectively with the opinions and abilities of others. Reality is that often comparisons to an immediate physical referent are not available. People then move on to subjective comparisons of abilities with others. Festinger demonstrated through his research that (1) subjective evaluations of abilities are unstable and that (2) when abilities could be objectively evaluated, they were not compared subjectively to other's abilities. So the drive to compare abilities was evident, but choice of comparison was also in force. Festinger then looked at how this choice was determined by people.

The third hypothesis was that the tendency to compare oneself with some other specific person decreases as the difference between his opinion or ability and one's own increases. A person, that is, does not compare himself with others who are too different. Given a range of possible people for comparison, someone close to one's own ability would be chosen for comparison or if the only comparison available is a very divergent one, the person will not be able to make a subjectively precise evaluation of his ability. Stability of evaluation then is dependent on the distance between one's own ability and the comparison group, with less attraction towards those that are very divergent,
and leading towards action being taken to associate with those perceived as having similar abilities.

In the fourth hypothesis, Festinger distinguished abilities from opinions by stating that there is an unidirectional drive upward in the case of abilities which is largely absent in opinions. Since no opinion in and of itself has any greater value than any other opinion, the value comes from the subjective feeling that the opinion is correct and valid. However, abilities, especially in our Western culture, are perceived as more valuable when stronger or higher.

The fifth hypothesis pointed out that opinions can be changed, but abilities are difficult and sometimes impossible to change. That is, with an opinion, a person can adjust to move closer to the comparison group demonstrating the pressure towards action mentioned in the third hypothesis. However, with abilities, which cannot easily be adjusted, pressure will focus on changing the environment.

Manifestations of this pressure towards uniformity were referred to in Festinger’s sixth and seventh hypotheses. The sixth hypothesis stated that the cessation of comparison with others is accompanied by hostility or derogation to the extent that continued comparison with those persons implies unpleasant consequences. However, with abilities, cessation
of comparison resulted in acknowledgement of the other's superiority. It was not until the seventh hypothesis was tested, focusing on the relevance given a particular ability, that cessation of comparison with abilities was found to result in cessation also of communication, which could be interpreted as hostility.

Hypothesis eight reflected both opinion and ability again when it stated that persons who are very divergent from one's own opinion or ability are perceived as different from oneself on attributes consistent with the divergence; the tendency to narrow the range of comparability became stronger. Research supported that when the perception of a difference was consistent with reality, comparison ceased. For example, when students scored lower than a classmate, known to be very intelligent, they stopped comparing themselves to that classmate. When they scored lower than a classmate who was known to be comparable in intelligence to themselves, they looked for the reasons for the discrepancy in the scores.

Structuring groups then needs to consider the implications of this research. The drive for self-evaluation is a force acting on persons to belong to groups. The subjective evaluation of adequacy of abilities is the satisfaction that people attain through these associations. People tend to move into groups where the abilities are near
their own and out of groups where they cannot satisfy their drive for self-evaluation. If hindered in this movement in and out of groups, the person will suffer. If his ability is higher than the group norm, he will stop evaluating and communicating. If his ability is lower than the group norm, his self-concept is jeopardized and again communication ceases.

In the last fifteen years, students' self-concept or the strength of their self-esteem has been a focus of school and administrator concern. Parents and consumers of educational services are more aware of the importance of the self-concept over a lifetime. Class placements and groupings of students bring parents into school offices more quickly than any other administrative decision. Already in 1976, educational textbooks were stating that students whose friends are similar to themselves have more stable self-evaluations than do students whose friends are dissimilar (Schneider, 1976). However, with pressure on administrators towards integration of divergent groups of students, providing groupings of similar friends becomes more difficult.

In 1976, researchers Strang, Smith and Rogers looked at the effect school groupings had on students' self-concepts. They found that children used classroom reference groups in forming and maintaining their self-concepts. When
similar others were available, children used those who were similar and disregarded those who were not similar, thus protecting their self-concepts from possible diminution. They also found that when similar others were removed as a source of comparison, self-concepts declined if those remaining were superior on the relevant ability dimension. The impact on administrative educational decisions these researchers felt was that groupings of students needed to provide sufficient similar others or serious detrimental harm could occur to the academically handicapped child.

In 1984, researcher Henry Svec expressed concern about mainstreaming learning disabled students because of how the regular educational environment might impact their developing self-concepts. By studying 50 learning disabled students, he found that their self-concepts were directly related to a specific environment depending on their perceived ability levels. If they felt their ability in math was close to that of the group of students with whom they were placed in math classes, their self-concept was strong in the math class. If they felt their ability in science was lower than the rest of the students in their science classes, their self-concept was weaker in science classes. Therefore, specific self-concepts in specific subjects would be valuable knowledge when making high school class placement decisions.
Coleman (1983) was another researcher who felt it was imperative for education to understand the importance class placement made to a child’s self-concept. He used Festinger’s social comparison theory as a base to look at handicapped students’ educational placements. Results of the research indicated that self-concept scores in the mildly handicapped sample increased upon placement in segregated classes. Evidence also suggested that reduced self-concept in preadolescence was more likely to occur when children (handicapped or not) perceived their abilities to be inferior to their primary reference group. Coleman indicated that during the preadolescent period, self-concept appeared to be primarily a function of reflected self-appraisals (or social comparisons) to others significant to the child, that is, children used their primary reference group (often classmates) for evaluative purposes. Consequently, the developmental nature of self-concept in children needs to be considered when looking at what provides their primary reference group.

Two years later, 1983, Coleman again published regarding social comparison groups for handicapped students. This time he also used socioeconomic status (SES) to divide groups of children. He tested two specific hypotheses: 1) handicapped children high in academic ability in relation to their special-class peers would have more positive self-
concepts than low-achieving handicapped children and 2) within the group of children who were inferior academically to their handicapped peers, those from higher SES levels would have lower self-concepts than those from lower SES levels. In the discussion of this research, Coleman first discarded the notion of objective performance, such as might be measured by a standardized achievement test. Ability he felt, had to be considered from the child's perspective, that is, the child compared his or her own skills in relation to those of others who comprised their social comparison group. Then, the results of this research suggested that handicapped students from high SES levels have self-concepts significantly lower than those of all other students. Even within new reference groups (special education class placements), these students continued to view themselves as deficient compared to other students, resulting in lower self-concept reports. Coleman cautioned that educators not underestimate the difficulties of handicapped children from prosperous homes, since such settings often provide a more cohesive, supportive environment for children's growth. Yet, with regard to children's self-concept, it appears that it is the relatively advantaged child who may suffer most from handicapping conditions that limit school success. Coleman concluded that identity formation, and subsequent
maintenance, is a complex process with children's knowledge of themselves and their larger social network developing through stages. These cognitive-developmental stages allow the preadolescent to remain immune to their position in the larger social network while increasing the use of their immediate referent group. Thus, homogeneous groupings, such as special education classes, could be viewed as supportive rather than restrictive and labeling.

Researchers continued to look at the educational policy of integrating handicapped students with non-handicapped students. Marie Fritz (1990), looked carefully at integration as a value for students. She separated integration into three types: physical, social and instructional. This is a useful concept since social integration has not been found to result from physical integration alone. Fritz also noted that much of the research on social interaction in integrated settings with person with disabilities involved preschool children, where the smaller developmental discrepancy between handicapped students and non-handicapped students must be considered. She felt there was a need to examine the social interactions of older students in integrated settings. She arranged for disabled and non-disabled peers to have daily instances of integrated activities. The findings were that togetherness did not necessarily produce social interaction and that even
an appeal to the non-disabled peers for friendship towards the disabled students failed to impact social interaction.

These studies combining Festinger's social comparison theory and handicapped subjects reveal the struggle currently in educational settings to discover the meaning of social inclusion for disabled students. While the research has helped to clarify the meaning of integration, it has failed to find a comfortable place for the handicapped to grow and learn so they can reach their full potential and have a place in their communities.
The qualitative research method was chosen to attempt to give a voice to people directly affected by special education services. The students in special education settings and their families are the people experiencing each day the special education world, structured and provided by professional educators. Frustration and a feeling of being victimized often describe the parents of a handicapped child. Even when legislation was to protect and provide special education services, families found inappropriate settings for their handicapped child to be all that were provided their child. This research then was conducted in the qualitative manner so that social phenomena could be clarified; social processes illuminated.

The goal was to understand very clearly what is going on for the handicapped student in special education settings; to explicitly set forth these understandings; to pass the information along especially to educational administrators who make placement decisions. It is not the intentions of the professional educator that are being judged, but rather the offering of a perspective from those most affected.
Qualitative research was chosen so that words rather than numbers could assist in communicating what has been learned to others. Description of both the inner life as well as the outer life of the handicapped student was considered to be powerful information, needed to motivate real changes in educational placements.
CHAPTER III
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The methods of research are presented in this chapter. The Social-Comparison Theory developed by Leon Festinger was used as the theoretical base. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used to organize the responses and personal observations received during the research period. The procedures for conducting the study are also presented.

SUBJECTS

The subjects for this study were 26 special education students and their parents. All 26 special education students attend a private special education school, located on a 36 acre campus, where related services of physical/occupational therapy and speech/language therapy are provided.

The 26 students consisted of 11 males and 15 females. They were between the ages of 9 and 19 years. They all had attended this special education school for at least one year and not more than five years. Also, they all had school experience in integrated settings where they were in daily contact with regular education students, prior to attending this segregated private special education school.
All the students interviewed for this research were previously classified as being eligible for special education services. Nine of the students (35%) were classified as Learning Disabled (LD). Ten of the students (38%) were classified as Educable with Mental Handicaps (EMH). Six of the students (23%) were classified as Trainable with Mental Retardation (TMH), and one student (3%) was dually classified as Physically Handicapped and Learning Disabled (PH/LD).

All of the parents, except for one, came to the school for personal interviews with the researcher. The one parent, who was unable to come to the school, allowed the researcher to conduct the interview over the phone. Follow up questions and conversations during the structured interview were the norm and rapport appeared to be established.
COLLECTION OF DATA

To obtain information from the special education students and their parents, a structured personal interview was conducted by the researcher. Each family was called and a time was arranged when they could meet personally with the researcher. All but one family was able to come into the school and meet in a private office. With the family unable to meet with the researcher because of transportation difficulties, the interview was conducted over the phone. A set of seven questions was used as a base for each interview with encouragement given for additional comments. Parents interviewed expressed interest in the research and were also looking for information to help them make difficult placement decisions for their handicapped children.

Each student interviewed met with the researcher in a private office and appeared to enjoy the individual attention. The climate of each interview was purposefully kept open and casual to encourage further comments and conversation. Again, a set of eight questions was used as a base to guide the interviews with attention given towards the open ended format. Since these are students who have a history of being tested and interviewed often by psychologists and social workers, they did not appear to be
uncomfortable with the interview situation and their answers can be considered valid for each of them at that time.
PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions were used with each parent interview. Many parents elaborated on their answers, which was the goal of the researcher, and their own words were recorded for later analysis.

1. What is happening, specifically on this campus, that is good for your child?

2. How do these happenings benefit/not benefit your child?

3. Does your child have friends here at school; at home; in the neighborhood?

4. How does what is happening on this campus with your child, relate to your family life?

5. How does life on this campus compare to other settings for your child?

6. Would you want your child to attend a regular school? Why or why not?
Students were each asked the following eight questions and encouraged to elaborate on their answers. All of the learning disabled (LD) students and the educable with mental handicaps (EMH) students were able to understand and answer all the questions. The students classified as trainable with mental handicaps (TMH) could answer some of the questions, but had more difficulty understanding the process. Their answers were more sparse and concrete. The interview questions were:

1. What do you like about being on this campus?
2. What do you not like about being on this campus?
3. Who are your friends at this school?
4. Who are your friends at home or in your neighborhood?
5. Do you have fun here at school?
6. Do you have friends to play with at school?
7. What activities at school do you enjoy the most?
8. Would you like to go to a regular school? Why or why not?

In developing the above questions, thought was given to focusing on specific areas while striving for open-ended questions that would allow flexibility. It was hoped that the open-endedness of the questions would encourage further
comments not restricted necessarily to pre-determined categories. Emerging concepts, previously perhaps not verbalized, were desired for further analysis.
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The qualitative research method was chosen for this study to give a voice to parents of handicapped students and to the students themselves who showed frustration with administrative placement decisions in educational settings. Since the goal of the research was to uncover the nature of people's experience with a phenomenon, it was determined that the intricate details of experiences would be more clearly imparted with qualitative research methods. Much of what this research was attempting to discover was the consequences of inner existential choices made by people. It was determined that the advantage of reporting data faithfully, in members own language, would avoid problems of reactivity and reflexivity (Fielding, p.67).

Fielding (1986) gave four principles for assessment of interrelationships of qualitative data:

1. Object is to be understood in its own terms
2. Object is to be understood in context
3. Object must conform to the "actuality" (pre-understanding) of the interpreter
4. Interpretation must be adequate in relation to the intentions of its originator.

These principles were followed during the research. Parents and students own words were recorded. They were
encouraged to extend answers and add to their own comments. The research was conducted in the "field" with both previous educational placements explored and future desires taken into account. There was a felt "match" between the exploratory nature of the interview questions and answers given, while the adequacy of the interpretation will be limited to same type sites. The object of the research was to seek to establish relationships among entities so that an explanation could be given for what was happening.

Since qualitative research is exploratory and measures presence (Kirk & Miller, 1986), it was felt this would give a base for future research which may, using quantitative measures, be more able to establish the strength of specific relationships. Hypothesis testing can follow discovery, but this research was focused on phenomena contrary to current educational philosophy and, therefore meanings rather than frequencies assumed significance. "What" to count was the immediate question with partial understandings valued, since learning more was considered better than establishing one significant finding. Additionally, it was felt that since the issue of educational placements of handicapped students is controversial, readers would perhaps understand best by examples, and especially if a principle then evolved from the examples which could be generalizable to future administrative decisions in this area. By having the reader
"hear" the words of the host culture, a certain sense of objectivity could be established.

Although this concreteness of hearing the words of actual handicapped students and family members, makes the data realistic and accessible, one relationship or incident certainly is not sufficient to confirm a set of relationships or properties or dimensions. However, when the data are illustrative of recurring patterns and significant categories, then insights are not only grounded, but also lend themselves to a more general understanding of the people and setting under study.
RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The basis of all good research is objectivity, or the simultaneous realization of as much reliability and validity as possible. Since reliability depends on explicitly described observational procedures, the same interview questions were asked of all students and families involved in the study. Their answers were recorded and became the data for the study. Participant observations were also recorded during the observations and used the words of the students and family members. The goal was always to use the exact words of the students and families involved in the study. Synchronic reliability (Kirk & Miller, 1986) was determined when similarities of observations were noted within the researched time period.

Convergent validity was sought by using both interviews and participant observation techniques. This yielded data from the interviewed families and students, as well as data from participating in various special education staffings. Always the question was asked, "Why did you chose a segregated setting?" A definition of validity was established by the similarity of answers given by students and families in the context of the multidisciplinary staffings. Parents and students were encouraged to answer the questions openly and frankly. Confidentiality was
assured by using coded numbers to replace all names. Thus data was generated from two distinct sources, and this data was then used as the basis for developing the categories using the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis.
THE CONSTANT COMPARATIVE METHOD
OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

In 1965, Barney G. Glaser, of the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco, wrote on the constant comparative method of qualitative research for the journal, Social Problem. In this article, he wrote of the difficulties in doing research on social problems due to sensitivity of subject matter, fears of future actions, stigma and legalities. He suggested that a way to obtain data would be a combination of observations and interviews which would yield best to qualitative analysis.

Struggling to match the clarity of quantitative analysis methods, Glaser presented the constant comparative method of analysis to offer another approach to handling data for researchers. The constant comparative method combined, according to Glaser, previous qualitative approaches, by using both coding of data and analysis towards generating theory. However, Glaser was also careful to note that the constant comparative method was not designed to "guarantee that two analysts working independently with the same data will achieve the same results; it is designed to allow, with discipline, for some of the vagueness and flexibility which aide the creative generation of theory (Glaser, 1965, p. 438)."
Generating properties and hypotheses about social occurrences, which move towards an integrated theory, is the goal of the constant comparative method of data analysis. Glasser described four stages to use in the analysis of data, with each stage moving into the next until the analysis is finished.

Stage one begins with the analyst fitting each incident into as many categories as possible. The goal is to have a theory that is conceptually dense, and in building theory later from the categories, sufficient data is necessary to give support to emerging categories over and over. These categories begin to emerge with major themes eventually evolving. If a conflict develops over category emphasis, Glaser encourages the researcher to note this shift of emphasis by recording a memo of the idea. This is done so as not to lose the thought or "uncomfortableness" with the themes, since it is that very impulse which begins to generate new themes or directions.

Stage two encourages the movement towards emerging properties for each theme, with some characteristics showing more saliency than others. One relationship or incident is not enough to confirm a set of relationships or properties or dimensions. Rather, sufficient data must be gathered to give evidence of and support to the development of the themes. The relatedness of themes also begins to emerge,
leading towards theoretical sensitivity based on the comparisons.

Stage three begins when the themes exhibit some underlying uniformities, thus delimiting terminology and text. The process of grouping themes and giving conceptual labels begins. Abstract concepts are sought since they tend to be more inclusive. Incidents are integrated into existing themes, and eventually point towards the development of a theory generalizable to a wider range of situations.

Stage four takes the data, the memos, and the emerging direction of the themes and summarizes suggested points. It is important to identify these points because this gives the theory specificity, that is, the suggestion of cause and effect according to the emerging theory supported by the themes. Concepts and relationships arrived at through this inductive process, illustrate that the theory development is grounded in the data. The illustrations add clarity towards the emerging theory, leading to single, higher level concepts, while the concreteness of grounding the theory in the data enhances reliability.

Analysis continues to occur in tandem with sampling, with analysis guiding the continuing data collection. Thus the grounded theory method of analysis evolves relevant to
Theoretical concepts, and validity is grounded in "the return trip".

The theoretical concept for the beginning categories can be based on existing social theory. These categories can provide the beginning structure for analysis, with the new data carrying the movement towards evolving later themes, their properties and dimensions. The social theory providing the stimulation for this research was Festinger's social reference theory.
FESTINGER'S SOCIAL REFERENCE THEORY

Festinger's social reference theory was selected in forming the beginning categories for analyzing the data. This theory supported the formation of the following first level categories:

1. Humans are driven to evaluate their opinions and abilities, that is, they want to be with others.
2. Humans want to check their perceived reality with others, that is, interact with others.
3. Humans seek to compare with others who are close to their own ability levels.
4. There is a unidirectional drive upward with friendships not being sought with those perceived as having much lower ability levels.

Second level themes were those derived from the parents responses to the interview which answered the overall research question regarding preference for a segregated setting for their handicapped child rather than an integrated setting. The following ten themes emerged when categorizing parental responses from the interview. These themes were the following:

1. The segregated setting has built my child's self-concept.
2. The segregated setting provides an atmosphere of acceptance.
3. The segregated setting provides a peer group.
4. The segregated setting provides socialization opportunities.
5. The segregated setting provides appropriate educational and related services.
6. The segregated setting provides a safe environment.
7. The segregated setting eases tension for my child.
8. The segregated setting made our family life better.
9. The segregated setting promoted independence for my child.
10. The segregated setting promoted normalization for my child.

After analyzing all parental responses, a percentage of the responses was found for each of the above second level themes. This helped to establish the weight given for each of the categories.
The following research questions were intrinsic to the development of the interview questions:

1. Does a segregated educational placement influence handicapped students positively or negatively?
2. What are the benefits, academic or social, of a segregated setting for a handicapped student?
3. Do handicapped students desire companionship with other handicapped students?
4. Do handicapped students develop, academically and socially, in a segregated educational setting better than in an integrated setting?
PROCEDURES

The spiral of research, observation, classification and analysis, targeted a population with which the researcher felt some affinity, having worked in special education for the past fifteen years. This affinity was used to maximize trust and obtain information.

General considerations regarding sampling were followed. The site was a segregated facility and the persons involved in the interviews and observations were those who had freely chosen a segregated facility for the delivery of special education services. In grounded theory, there is a concern with representativeness of concepts, since all grounded theory procedures are aimed at identifying, developing and relating concepts. Theoretical sampling was chosen as it is sampling based on concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory. The aim of this theoretical sampling was to sample events and incidents that were indicative of categories, relevant to the social reference theory.

Sampling became more purposeful as the research proceeded. Ongoing analysis caused the sampling to evolve on the basis of theoretical relevance, with observations especially adding to specific categories. The research was started with a personal interview conducted with the parents
of 26 handicapped students who now attend a segregated special education facility. All interviews were held in a private office with the exception of one interview which was conducted over the phone.

All 26 students were also interviewed in a private office individually. The students appeared to appreciate the individual attention and were quite open in their responses.

Responses were recorded by the researcher with encouragement given to parents and students to elaborate on their answers if they so desired. Many parents especially appeared to be happy to express their opinions and to have this opportunity to do so. Since qualitative research seeks to sample incidents, the interest was in gathering as much data as possible regarding the choice of a segregated facility. Often parent’s personal stories of what led to their choice of this segregated facility, gave the cumulative data necessary to concept formation.

The qualitative technique of participant observation was also used by the researcher during daily activities which included conferences, staffings, assemblies and classroom observations. Participant observation is considered to be one of the best qualitative techniques to reveal interactions in their most complex form. The participant observation technique worked well in tandem
between sampling and analysis. The ongoing analysis guided the data collection and observations became more attracted to sampling on the basis of the evolving theoretical concepts.

Observations were dated and noted on separate cards. These cards then were placed with completed interviews for later analysis.
ANALYSIS OF DATA

Upon completion of the interviews, the task of coding and analyzing the data was undertaken. For purposes of analysis, the data were reviewed twice, once using the first level categories and once using the second level emerging themes.

During the first reading of the responses, answers were placed in the modified social reference categories. From this reading, the 10 second level themes emerged. Responses were then reread to group them into the second level themes. A percentage of respondents fitting into each of the second level themes was computed. This allowed the researcher to quantitatively see the strength of each of the second level factors, which varied from a low of 23% to a high of 65%.

Next, observations began to be integrated into the themes. Sampling concentrated on development, density and saturation of themes. Selective coding evolved to fill in themes that needed further development, with sampling becoming very directed and deliberate. The goal was to be able to specify, rather than generalize, so that the conditions under which the phenomena existed could be accurately described.

It is difficult to work, to decide, without summary, abstraction or specification. This research hopes to
describe specification of handicapped students educational needs regarding educational placements and settings accurately, so that direction can be given to administrative work.
SUMMARY

A questionnaire was developed based on Festinger's social reference theory which basically sought to find out if parents and handicapped students preferred a segregated educational setting or an integrated educational setting. Twenty six students and their parents were individually interviewed.

Each interview was conducted by the researcher and their answers were written down for analysis. Data were first reviewed and answers categorized according to the social reference theory. Secondly, the data were reviewed for the strength of parental/student preference for the segregated setting. Direct wording and incidents were recorded by the researcher and will be used to illuminate the findings of this research.

Observations were also recorded in numerous participatory situations. These observations became more discriminate as analysis and category evolvement proceeded. The goal was to be able to specify concerning the action or interaction that pertain to the choice of a segregated educational setting for handicapped students and to predict the associated outcomes or consequences of that choice.
CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This research study was conducted to look at the people most affected by special education placement decisions, in order that administrators in key decision making roles would have access to empirical research which would assist them in making these decisions. People most affected by special education placement decisions are the parents/families of handicapped students and the handicapped students themselves. Interviews of the parents of special education students were conducted, the handicapped students were interviewed and observed, and the segregated special education setting was observed over the 4 year research period. These interviews and observations focused on the following four main research questions:

1. Does a segregated educational placement influence handicapped students positively or negatively?
2. What are the benefits, academic or social, of a segregated setting for a handicapped student?
3. Do handicapped students desire companionship with other handicapped students?
4. Do handicapped students develop, academically and socially, in a segregated educational setting better than in an integrated setting?

These four research questions generated parent and student interview questions which were used in each interview consistently. Parents and students were encouraged to extend their answers and to enrich the research data by adding details and specific instances which supported their feelings and decisions regarding special education placements.

The results of the interviews and observations were then reviewed and organized into four categories which reflected Festinger’s (1954) social reference theory. The four categories derived from the social reference theory were:

1. Humans are driven to evaluate their opinions and abilities, that is they want to be with other people.
2. Humans want to check their perceived reality with other humans and therefore want to interact with other people.
3. Humans seek to compare with other humans who are close to their own ability level.

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4. Friendships are not sought with those humans who are perceived as having lower ability levels.

Reading and reviewing the data from the interviews and observations and placing that data into the above four categories led to ten themes which emerged and showed significance. These themes led back to and began to answer the original four research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

Does a segregated educational placement influence handicapped students positively or negatively?

Four of the ten patterns of information which emerged from the data answered the question of positive or negative influence. These four patterns were:

1. The segregated educational placement eased tensions.
2. The segregated educational placement made family life better.
3. The segregated educational placement promoted independence.
4. The segregated educational placement promoted normalization.
Festinger (1954) had hypothesized that humans want to be with other humans and want to compare themselves to other humans whose abilities are close to their own abilities. Therefore, when the first two themes emerged from the data indicating that a segregated educational facility eased tensions for the handicapped student and made family life better, affinity was noted between the present data and Festinger’s social reference theory. Festinger had found already in 1954 that humans like to interact with other humans whose ability is close to their own ability levels. Hence, when parents and handicapped students indicated that a segregated setting eased tensions and made family life better, it correlated with the Festinger’s theory of social relevance. The first themes, easing tensions and improving family life, were often revealed in response to the interview question, "How does what is happening on this campus with your child, relate to your family life?" Parents responded with the following observations:

"Now we have a family life. Before we did not. She couldn’t handle interactions with regular kids and we were always in battles."
"When he was in an integrated educational setting it broke my heart. He was ridiculed, singled out."
"Now, I don't have to worry about him at recess time."

"We feel more relaxed with him here. Nothing is going to happen here to make him feel bad about himself. When he was mainstreamed, he felt like the odd man out. He's aware of his handicap, but he still wants to fit in."

"Putting her here took a large burden off of us. At the regular high school, the kids played tricks on her. We were afraid for her."

"It has made life smoother for us. We can feel a sense of her feeling better about herself. She still is retarded, but at least she doesn't feel bad about herself."

"He is happy here. He couldn't learn when he wasn't happy."

"He doesn't have the nightmares anymore. Now, he is willing to go to school. Before I had to fight with him every morning to get on the bus."
Observations recorded at special educational staffings also pointed to a lessening of tensions for handicapped students in segregated settings. One mother stated, "He is happier here. His aggression has decreased. He tried so hard before and he just couldn't find his niche." At another staffing, a school psychologist remarked, "She obviously feels secure here. Kids have to be available for learning, emotionally as well as anything." The words, "available for learning", became a summarizing concept that emerged throughout the research. Parents were not asking for a completely safe and secure educational environment, but wanted their handicapped children to be safe and secure enough to be "available for learning".

The "available for learning" expression became a summarizing concept which assembled much of the research data. When the environment provided sufficient security, the students could begin to move around without fear and begin to respond to the environment. When parents were asked, "How does what is happening on this campus benefit or not benefit your child?", they responded as follows:

"He's learned to think on his own. He is more independent and he is happy to come to school."
"She is more accepted in this setting, so she participated. She is part of the whole school, not just part of one class."

"She is more relaxed and independent. She walks to the bus by herself now."

"He has grown up here. He doesn't feel pushed down all the time."

"In the integrated setting, he was always being put down.

"They talked about him right in front of him. He is handicapped, but he isn't stupid. Here they treated him normally. He likes this school. He talks about the school and his friends here a lot. Before, we could hardly deal with him."

The segregated setting also provided many experiences where the handicapped students could participate. At the awards day ceremony, they were observed while accepting their awards. Their behavior may have been ridiculed in
the regular schools, however in this setting, they could respond freely. They could hug their trophies with excessive emotion, they could use their communication systems to acknowledge their awards, they could pat their chests and smile their immature smiles without mockery or derision. They participated and felt success. They did not have to measure up to "normal" peers.

Another parent, who also is a special education coordinator, talked about her son who is in an integrated setting. She said, "My son is scared of the normal kids and is not comfortable around them. I wish he was in a segregated setting where he wouldn’t have to worry about the normal kids so much. He could be more independent and not have to depend on his special education teacher for protection."

So in seeking answers to the question of influence in a segregated special education setting, this research indicated that students feel less tension which in turn enables them to be more independent and moves them towards fuller participation in school life. This participation is what parents viewed as being closer to normal for their handicapped students.

Several studies, reviewed prior to this research, had also concluded that social difficulties for the retarded resulted in anxiety and dissatisfaction with peer
relationships (MaHeady, Harper & Sainato, 1987; Riester & Bessette, 1986; Stone & LaGreca, 1990; Taylor, Asher & Williams, 1987). It is reasonable to conclude that these anxieties would be carried over into family life and would impact on the handicapped student's development towards independence. Few families can ignore the hurt of one of its members and few persons, especially with limited cognitive abilities, can evolve and mature in a non-supportive environment.

Festinger (1954) in his social reference theory demonstrated with his research the movement people make towards other persons similar to themselves in abilities. His research also supported the theory that there is less attraction towards those who are divergent in abilities, which, in an integrated setting, would leave the cognitively limited person with few persons with whom to relate. When Strang, Smith & Rogers (1976) used the social reference theory to look closely at class groupings in elementary schools, they too found that children formed groups with similar others and disregarded those who were not similar. Past research and theory then support the information shared in this research by parents of the handicapped regarding anxieties revolving around friendships. Participation in school life with consequential development of social skills is difficult without mutual attraction.
between peers, and the handicapped students, as well as the "normal" students need to practice social skills in order for them to develop and strengthen. Parents of handicapped students appear to be correct when they find the segregated special education environment supportive of growth and development for their child. The handicapped students themselves give support to their emotional health in a comfortable school setting without the divergence of abilities that an integrated setting proposes. Interdependence certainly is a value for American society, but integration of people with various abilities in all settings may be harming the very people it was meant to assist.
RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

What are the benefits, academic or social, of a segregated setting for a handicapped student?

Reviewing the data on answering the second research question revealed that four of the ten emerging themes stressed the benefits of a segregated educational setting. These four themes indicated that the segregated setting:

1. Built the handicapped students self concept.
2. Provided an atmosphere of acceptance.
3. Provided appropriate educational services.
4. Provided a safe atmosphere.

Three of these patterns, building the self concept, providing an atmosphere of acceptance and providing a safe atmosphere, later came under the summarizing concept of "available for learning". However, in the beginning these patterns indicated specific benefits that parents or observations were noting.

When looking at self concept enhancement, responses and observations such as the following were noted:

"When my daughter was in an integrated setting, she
felt the difference between herself and the other kids. Her self concept nose dived. Now, she interacts on a peer level, participates on the basketball team, and talks about the school and her friends all the time. She is happy now."

"She has a friend here. She has a hard time mixing, so having a friend gives her confidence. When she is with normal kids, they get embarrassed about her and she knows something is uncomfortable. Here she feels accepted."

"When our son was in an integrated setting, his deficits were so obvious. Now he is just one of the kids at school."

"He gets positive feedback here. He likes to sing in the choir and that helps him feel good about himself."

A school psychologist noted that a student he had previously tested was making gains in the segregated setting, which did not happen when the student had been in the district’s integrated special education program. The gains were attributed to ego strength development derived
from having successful school experiences and from having a comfortable peer group with which to interact. The student specifically was more aware of the general environment which raised scores on general information testing. Again, the environment provided sufficient support for the student to be "available for learning".

Parents and students responding to the question asking about the benefits of a segregated setting, shared that a feeling of being accepted was very important to them. This was often stated both positively and negatively by parents. Positive statements by the parents reflected that their children now had friends, their children felt they were on an equal basis with the other students, their children felt a part of someplace. One mother stated, "She finally has a home away from home."

In contrast, the parents related stories of their children in the former integrated settings which had been difficult for their children. Another summarizing concept of statements collected under the heading, "zoo". This came from one parent's comment when he said, "It was as if my son was in a zoo and the rest of the kids could look at him and make fun of him if they wanted to. Even the teachers talked negatively about him in front of him." This category was reflected in the following types of observations:
"He felt like odd man out all the time."

"The special education class was always kept apart. The difference was always there."

"When she couldn’t work the lock on her locker, they played tricks on her. She became totally isolated."

"The boys took advantage of her. It was a degrading experience."

Because most families had first placed their handicapped children in integrated educational settings where they had experienced frustrations, the parents gave prominence to the benefit of having an atmosphere of acceptance of their children. They wanted their children out of the "zoo" atmosphere and into an atmosphere, which was physically safe and emotionally accepting. Safety was mentioned by parents and students. Students spoke of their fears and uncomfortableness in previous settings which were integrated within regular education settings. Parents spoke about their handicapped children feeling secure and safe in the segregated setting. They shared stories of their children being tricked and used in integrated settings. One father became quite emotional when talking about finally
getting his handicapped son into a segregated setting. Previously, his older son, also handicapped, had been educated in an integrated educational setting. He had been used by the gangs, usually to hold weapons, because the gangs knew that the courts go easy on handicapped boys. Since his son was afraid of the gangs, he would do what they told him. The father felt that in the segregated setting, his handicapped son could stand up for himself better since all the students were handicapped in one way or another. He did not want a second son to be used, when the boy was handicapped in protecting or defending himself. So an atmosphere that was physically safe and emotionally accepting was basic in the parent's choice of educational settings.

The fourth major theme that emerged in answer to the questions regarding the benefits of a segregated setting for handicapped students was that the setting provided appropriate educational services. By this the parents meant that their handicapped children could get their physical, occupational and speech therapies all within the same building, during the school day, as an integrated part of their educational program. The therapists were a part of the school staff and interacted with the teachers daily. What was focused on in individual therapies could be reinforced in the classrooms later by the teachers. Parents
mentioned times when the physical therapist, noting how the child was sitting on a piece of playground equipment, corrected the child’s body alignment while demonstrating to the teacher on duty what to watch for in the future. With all of the staff being in special education, they could work together on similar challenges.

The classrooms and academic lessons were also noted by the parents. Classes were small, with children of similar handicaps grouped together. Their child wasn’t the only such handicapped child in the school building. Academic lessons were taught to mastery and children were not just passed on. Some of the comments from parents were as follows:

"He is working at his own level here."

"She is understood here. Her teacher is not the only special education teacher in the building."

"The learning is geared for her here."

"The consistency and structure he needs is here."
Providing appropriate services was important to parents. However, this was not a pivotal theme. Handicapped children had been provided appropriate services in former integrated settings. Appropriate services had to exist in the setting of choice, but had not been the most important factor in the parents fight to get their children into a segregated setting. They did express appreciation for the integration of the related services into the total educational plan and that their children did not have to move from building to building to receive these services. There was also expressed appreciation for the value of having many special educators in the same building who could consult with each other for help when needed. So while this was not a deciding theme, it was seen as a benefit of the segregated setting.

The summarizing concept, "available for learning", included three of these emerging themes and was seen by the parents as the determining factor in their choice of educational settings. They felt their children needed to feel safe, feel accepted, and have their self concepts supported in order to learn. While appropriate services were necessary in the educational setting, parents had experienced these services also in integrated settings and did not view that as a benefit only of the segregated setting. However, safety, acceptance and supported self
concepts, were viewed by parents as being specific to segregated special education settings.

Researchers had also found that parents regarded friendships for their handicapped children as extremely important to their development (Stainback, 1987; Waggoner & Wilgosh, 1990), and while agreeing with the parents regarding the importance of friendship, the focus would then turn to developing the social skills of the handicapped students. Earlier education, social skill training and coaching were all suggested, but by 1987 some researchers were asking for group solutions for the handicapped so that students with common difficulties could help each other (Dudley, 1987). While not moving away from the concept of integration, at least concrete suggestions regarding their comfort in everyday living were being offered.

Festinger (1954) had already found evidence that people move away from those who are very divergent in abilities. This concept was further researched and found supported when homogeneous groupings were developing in educational circles (Strang, Smith & Rogers, 1976). Environments impacted developing self-concepts (Svec, 1984) and had to be considered when making educational placements. However, the concept of integration appears to be so attractive today to educators, that artificial supports are developed to force its appearance. When the supports fade, mutuality of
attraction, according to researchers, will not hold (Macmillan, 1982; Fox, 1989). It is that psychological price, that parents of handicapped students do not want to pay. They want their children to go to school each day where they are accepted and can develop.
RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

Do handicapped students desire companionship with other handicapped students?

Proponents of integrated educational settings for handicapped students argue that handicapped students have the right to be with regular education students. They further argue that the modeling of "normal" behaviors will have a beneficial effect on the handicapped students. Therefore, data were gathered in this research regarding whether handicapped students and their families really did desire to be placed with regular education students. Toward that goal, the question was asked of parents, "Does your child have friends here at school?" All 26 (100%) parents interviewed responded in the affirmative. They added comments, such as the following:

"Calls them a lot."

"Talks about the kids in school and they phone back and forth."
"Talks about them constantly. He never had a friend at school before."

"She talks about my friends at school. Her world is comfortable here."

When the students themselves were asked if they had friends at school, all 26 (100%) answered yes. They often would go beyond their answer to name several of their friends at school as if to substantiate their answer. Having a friend at school was very important to them. In contrast, when the parents were asked if their handicapped child had friends at home or in the neighborhood, only 7 (27%) replied in the affirmative and they added qualifying additional statements, such as the following:

"... the kids next door, but they tend to criticize."

"Some from when he was in the Early Childhood classes for two years, but now no buddy-buddy friends."

"It’s better now than when he was mainstreamed into the neighborhood school. They don’t know so much about his learning problems now and are more
willing to accept him."

"One neighbor child, but their abilities are pulling them apart."

"Through the special education park district programs."

"Right now, but the differences are becoming greater."

"Yes, but always younger."

The other 21 (81%) parents who answered no to the question of whether their handicapped child had friends in the neighborhood or at home, also added additional comments. Some of these comments were:

"Some are friendly to her, but will not be her friend."

"Other kids have little patience with him. Even his siblings have little patience with him."

"Socializing is the biggest problem."
"They’ve matured past her."

"There are no peers for her in the neighborhood."

"The difference in their abilities pulls them apart and it gets worse as they get older."

"Others leave him behind. Even the younger ones have past him up now."

When the students were asked if they had friends in the neighborhood or at home, they gave the following responses:

11 (42%) students said yes and could name at least one friend.

10 (38%) students said yes and named family members such as Mom, Dad, Grandparents or siblings.

2 (8%) students said yes and indicated these were friends from the special education park district programs.

3 (12%) students said they didn’t know.
The students' perceptions were different from the parents and perhaps the parents were more sensitive than the students when the students were rejected. However, even in the students responses, there did not appear to be natural peer groups forming in the neighborhoods for the handicapped students. Family members were often seen as the friends in and around the home area. Other friendships were established through special education connections, such as park district programs.

Further questioning of the students and their families, regarding whether they would want to attend a regular education school if their educational needs were met, revealed the importance of friendship to both the families and the students themselves. The answers provided two of the major themes to emerge in the research:

1. The segregated educational setting provides a peer group.
2. The segregated educational setting provides socialization opportunities.

In talking about attending a segregated facility rather than being mainstreamed in regular education, the students mentioned friends and activities. They wanted to stay with
their friends and they wanted to participate in specific activities, such as the basketball team or the school choir. Similarly, when parents discussed their choice of a segregated facility over mainstreaming, they spoke about a peer group for their handicapped child and about the activities in which they could now participate. Some of their comments regarding friendships and social activities were:

"She needs her own group due to her social needs. Other kids see the differences and they won't mix. It's unrealistic to think the other kids will really socialize with her. They are nice to her, but that's it. She needs to meet with successes in her own setting".

"He can do everything here. His social needs are met and the extras are a big part of it."

"As kids get older, interactions change. She needs level peer interactions for friendships. Here she has that opportunity."

"Sports and music added to his confidence. Participation really boosted him."
Students and parents never said they wanted friendships with other handicapped children. However, they placed a lot of emphasis on having friends in the segregated setting and, because of those friendships, did not want to leave the segregated setting. Having a peer group and participating in school activities were strong themes in each decision. When one parent was asked at the end of the discussion if she would want her child in the regular school rather than segregated, she concluded, "No, she feels comfortableness here. She needs to be comfortable in order to learn." Parents do want their children to make progress, but all seemed to feel that their children needed to "be available for learning" in order for progress to happen. The available for learning concept included friendships and participation in activities. Handicapped students may not consciously desire friendships with other handicapped students, but they do desire friendship in a reciprocal interactive style. They do want to participate and be accepted without their differences being highlighted.

Previous researchers found that handicapped and non-handicapped were tense and constrained in their interactions with each other (Hannah & Pliner, 1983), and that they preferred other handicapped students as peers when given a choice (Madge, Affleck & Lowenbraun, 1990). Researchers
also noted the importance parents gave to friendships for their handicapped children (Stainback, 1987), and parents have even shared the embarrassment their handicapped children feel when they are with same age peers (Waggoner & Wilgosh, 1990). The resulting social isolation (Meyerowitz, 1967) and loneliness (Taylor, 1986) of integrated handicapped students does not promote peer group formation. Even when educators structured integration of the handicapped students to promote socialization, their social status did not increase (Fox, 1989; White, 1990).

Festinger (1954) had suggested a relationship of cognitive ability to social interaction, and support for this hypothesis was concluded again when it was found that sophistication of interactive strategy reflected cognitive ability (Selman & Demorest, 1984; Maheady, Harper & Sainato, 1987). Thus, parents of handicapped students in seeking segregated educational placements were acting in a manner which was already suggested in 1954 by Festinger in his theory of social relevance which had found that people want to be with other people of similar cognitive ability levels. Parents of handicapped students wanted their children to have friendships based on mutuality and a segregated setting encouraged the development of reciprocal and supportive friendships.
RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR

Do handicapped students develop, academically and socially, in a segregated educational setting better than in an integrated setting?

This question was answered in the affirmative by both the parents and the students. Of course, this was a group of parents who had fought to have their handicapped child attend a segregated special education facility, so they could be expected to give this answer and the children would be expected to follow the parents lead. However, the question still remained as to how they did better in a segregated facility. Couldn't they do just as well in an integrated setting, if all the other parts of the educational program were equal? What was it about a segregated setting that made it more likely the handicapped child would make some progress?

Parents' answers fell into two contrasting groups. The largest group of responses came under the summarizing concept of the handicapped child being "available for learning". In contrast, they spoke about not wanting their child to feel as though they were in a "zoo". These two summarizing concepts seemed to compress most of the responses in the research, with the exception of responses regarding
related services. Related services were spoken about more at the convenience level of existence, whereas choice of educational setting was spoken about at a very necessary and emotional level of existence.

The concept, "available for learning", was spoken about in every interview, conducted with parents. It was only when their child was comfortable enough, happy enough, that they went beyond that base. Otherwise, they kept returning throughout the interview to talking about their child needing to be "okay" before anything else could happen for their child. One mother would not discuss anything else about educational settings. She kept returning to, "He’s happy now, so I’m happy. He gets on the bus without fighting every morning. He doesn’t have nightmares anymore. It’s all I wanted."

The students’ responses did not address feeling more comfortable in the segregated setting, but did talk about friendships and participating in school activities. Of the 26 students interviewed, 24 (92%) spoke about liking their friends, having friends or doing activities with friends at the segregated setting. Another 19 out of the 26 students (73%) spoke about specific activities they were involved in and that they enjoyed. Friendships and activities were the two themes that emerged consistently in the student’s interviews as being the most important to them. Not only
were they mentioned the most often, but they were often mentioned first in response to questions.

Friendships and participation in activities were parts of the answers parents gave as to why their children did better in a segregated setting. Being in a segregated facility meant that their child was out of the "zoo" category which they interpreted as:

"Having to compete with normal kids all the time."

"Always having the difference right there."

"Being put down."

"Being teased and taken advantage of."

"Being shunned."

"Not being accepted socially."

"Standing out."

"Ridiculed."

"Worrying about recess time."
"Feeling like odd man out."

"My child withdrew, she was being swallowed up."

"He was being lost in the shuffle."

"Even when integrated, they were separated out."

"Only in one room, and didn’t have the freedom of the whole school."

"The whole rest of the school looked at him as odd and different."

In contrast, being in a segregated facility, allowed the child to participate, have the freedom of the entire building, enjoy friendships on a buddy-buddy basis and be supported sufficiently to be "available for learning". Once that level of comfort was achieved, then parents would begin looking for additional advantages. These advantages would be specific to the handicapped child. Some parents wanted them to improve behaviorally so that they were easier to deal with in public. Other parents wanted them to make gains in daily living skills so they could become less
dependent on the parents. Still other parents were looking for academic or vocational gains. No parents felt the segregated facility prevented these gains from occurring and all mentioned the comfort level achieved by their handicapped child because of experiencing friendships.

Due to the entire facility being geared towards handicapped students, freedom and independence could be allowed throughout the school without fears normally incurred in a facility also housing regular education students. Parents felt this was a distinct advantage, making their handicapped students stronger for the day when they would go out into the community. One mother referred to integration as that of taking an infant out of a playpen and putting the child in the street to play, since that is where the child would eventually have to learn to deal with traffic. Being ready for each experience was considered important to parents, especially since their already handicapped children could so easily be frustrated and overwhelmed. They wanted some progress if possible, but saw that this could occur only in an environment that allowed the child to be "available for learning". All the parents in this research group did feel that their children developed in a segregated educational setting, and did it better than if they had been in an integrated setting. They attributed progress to the setting rather than to any part
of the setting, wanting the whole environment to be supportive of the child's welfare.

Parents have support from researchers when they say their handicapped children are lonely (Taylor, 1986; Bahan, 1987), rejected (Fox, 1989) and isolated (Vaugh, Ridley & Cox, 1983; Luftig, 1988). They also have support when they indicate that cognitive ability impacts friendship choices (Festinger, 1954; Selman & Demorest, 1984), that social skill training programs fail (Madge, Affleck & Lowenbraun, 1990) and that social difficulties are more of a hindrance to success in life than even academic problems (Jackson Enright & Murdock, 1987). Highlighting the basic need in life for friends, was the mother who kept returning to, "He's happy, so I'm happy." Integration of their handicapped children into society is a goal of parents, but within that open structure they want peers and friendships strengthening to their developing self concepts. They want them to qualify for teams and participation, rather than lose the social practice of these school activities. When similar peers are removed, confidence erodes, and when similar peers are available, confidence stabilizes (Scheider, 1976). Like all parents, these parents of handicapped children want development and progress for their children, not rejection and isolation.
SUMMARY

Segregated special education facilities continue to exist and continue to be a choice of some parents and educators. In this research, 26 of these decisions were analyzed. The causal factors for these changes in educational placement were the handicapped student's unhappiness and lack of development or progress. Once at the segregated special education facility, the students and families appeared to be satisfied with their choice of educational placements. Since segregating handicapped students is counter to the current educational movement of integrating students, this research looked at what in the segregated facility made it a choice for these parents and their children.

From the interviews and observations, 10 themes emerged related to segregated facilities. They were:

1. The segregated facility built up the student's self-concept.
2. The segregated facility provided an atmosphere of acceptance.
3. The segregated facility provided a peer group.
4. The segregated facility provided socialization opportunities.
5. The segregated facility **provided appropriate educational services.**

6. The segregated facility **provided a safe atmosphere.**

7. The segregated facility **eased tension for the student.**

8. The segregated facility **made family life better.**

9. The segregated facility **promoted independence.**

10. The segregated facility **promoted normalization.**

These ten themes helped to answer the research questions, and also led to a summarizing concept that compressed the phenomena taking place in a segregated educational facility for handicapped students. This summarizing concept came from a comment made by a school psychologist at a staffing, after completing an evaluation of a child now placed at a segregated educational facility. The psychologist remarked that the child was now "available for learning." This concept, "available for learning," was able to include the safety themes, the belonging or socializing themes, the themes regarding participation in school activities and the themes regarding the handicapped students having a sufficient peer group with whom they felt comfortable. The data were now reviewed again with this summarizing concept.
The concept "available for learning" defined a space where these handicapped students were accepted, found a peer group, had opportunities to participate in school activities, and had convenient and appropriate educational services. In contrast, the integrated settings had made them more aware of the differences between themselves and the regular education students and had inhibited their development or progress. Could the advantages of the segregated facility be implemented in an integrated setting? The parents did not think they could because the differences between the handicapped students and the regular education students would be apparent, causing distance to remain between the two groups of students. While the formation of groups between students in school settings is common, parents of handicapped students felt that their children needed an environment in which the handicap did not define the groupings. In the segregated setting where all the students were challenged with a handicap, natural peer groupings could evolve, but the handicaps would not define the groupings. In the integrated setting, the handicaps often formed the first definition of peer groupings. This would set the handicapped students into a vulnerable group, allowing the handicap to construct the group rather than abilities or interests. This being able to choose peer groups through friendships and activities were the specifics
that the parents returned to again and again in speaking about the segregated facility. The handicaps were dealt with, but did not define the child or automatically put the child in a particular group. The more natural evolvement of friendships was the goal of the parents and what helped the handicapped students feel more normal and independent.

The consistency of parental and student responses regarding the importance of friendships in their school placement, correlates with Festinger's social reference theory. Festinger had found that people want to be with others whose abilities are similar. This is noted by parents and students in the segregated educational facility. They speak of their life in the segregated facility including friendships and participation in school activities. They speak about former integrated school placements in terms of being left out of activities and not included in any real friendships. Festinger had found the desire to be with people who have similar abilities to be strong enough to motivate people to action. The same seems to be true when parents work towards a segregated educational placement for their handicapped children. They want them to have peers, to be happy, to want to be at school. Being comfortable with peers appears to be important enough to impact development and progress in an educational placement. A social reference group then
appears to be a necessary part of deciding on an educational placement for a handicapped student.
The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of handicapped students and their parents regarding the segregated educational setting they had chosen for placement. Due to the stimulus of the Regular Education Initiative (REI) in the state of Illinois, the current educational philosophy is to educate handicapped students with their non-handicapped peers.

The private, segregated special education facility is regarded currently by many professional educators to be a piece of special education history. These facilities are receiving financial and political pressure to close, with regular education facilities encouraged to provide the instructional intensity, specialized curriculum and targeted training needed by handicapped students.

Specific objectives of this research were to find answers to the following questions:

1. Does a segregated educational placement influence handicapped students positively or negatively?

2. What are the benefits, academic or social, of a segregated setting for a handicapped student?
3. Do handicapped students desire companionship with other handicapped students?

4. Do handicapped students develop, academically and socially in a segregated educational setting better than in an integrated setting?

Since little empirically oriented attention has been focused on the handicapped students and their parents (Semmel, Abernathy, Butera & Lesar, 1991), the qualitative research methods concentrated on interviewing and observing the handicapped students themselves and their families. Parents and students were interviewed, activities at the segregated facility were observed and many staffings were participated in and observed. The resulting data were reviewed using the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis developed by Barney G. Glaser (1965). Festinger’s (1954) social reference theory supplied a beginning organizational base for categorizing the research results and was a fit for expressed parental and student perceptions. A summary of the results follows.
SUMMARY

Festinger's theory of social reference stated that people want to be with other people, want to interact with others, seek to compare themselves with others whose ability levels are similar and do not seek friendships with those people whose ability level they consider to be lower than their own. Since peers have been found to be crucial and influential in determining a child's self-concept (Riester & Bassette; 1986) and handicapped students have been found to be socially rejected more often than non-handicapped peers (MaHeady, Harper & Sainato, 1987; Stone & LaGreca, 1990), empirical research regarding educational placements of handicapped students appeared appropriate, considering the current pressure to educate handicapped students with non-handicapped students.

Parents of handicapped students and handicapped students were interviewed and observed in a segregated educational setting to learn their perceptions about the handicapped students educational placement when it is segregated from the placement of non-handicapped students. Responses and observations were first placed into four main categories of Festinger's social reference theory. This organization of the data revealed ten main themes of
response that were often repeated by parents and handicapped students, and validated over and over in observations of interactions and conversations throughout the research period. These responses answered the research questions and began to build the summarizing concept that students need to be available for learning.

The concept that students need to be ready to learn for learning to happen is not new to education. In the 1960's schools began feeding children because they knew that hungry children could not learn. However, connecting the concept of learning availability and placing students with a receptive peer group as a basis for learning to occur has not been a strong educational movement. In fact, for handicapped students, the educational pressure is to educate handicapped students with non-handicapped students because it is felt handicapped students will need to live as adults with non-handicapped people. The resulting rejection handicapped students experience has been well documented (Ray, 1985).

The first research question sought information regarding the influence a segregated educational setting would have on handicapped students. The responses indicated that the segregated placement eased tensions for the handicapped students and improved family life. These were expected responses. However, additional responses indicated
that the segregated setting promoted independence and development towards normalization for the handicapped student. These unanticipated responses were the most interesting and when pursued in following interviews and observations, conceived the learning availability concept. Special education administrators who were making segregated placements for handicapped students especially were questioned in staffings for these students. It was a school psychologist, who evaluated handicapped students in segregated placements, who stated in one of these staffing conversations that the handicapped students were available for learning in this segregated setting and therefore they were making academic and emotional progress. Since qualitative research is discovery orientated, unanticipated responses could be easily accepted and even valued. The conceived idea that handicapped students need to be available for learning fit this research and became a summarizing concept which incorporated much of the resulting data.

The second research question sought information regarding the benefits of segregated placement for handicapped students. Responses indicated that the segregated placement was supportive of the self-concept of the handicapped student, provided mutuality in friendships, conveniently furnished related educational services, and was
a safe atmosphere. While related educational services such as speech and physical/occupational therapies had also been provided in integrated educational settings, parents did express appreciation for the convenience of having these services incorporated into the same building and staff where the handicapped child was educated. The benefit of having therapists interact daily with the special education teachers on behalf of their handicapped student was noted by several parents. Special education teachers themselves expressed appreciation for being able to consult easily and regularly with other special education teachers and the therapists who deliver the related services. This was seen then as a strong benefit of a segregated setting, but not as a deciding factor in placement decisions.

The additional benefits of strengthening handicapped students self-concepts, providing friendships and mutuality of acceptance, and securing a safe environment were noted by parents and professionals in special education as deciding placement factors. The strength of the responses can be noted in the following table:

65% of parents interviewed noted the segregated placement strengthened their handicapped child’s self concept.

61% of parents interviewed noted the segregated placement provided an atmosphere of acceptance.
54% of parents interviewed noted the segregated placement provided a safe atmosphere.

These benefits were not specifically solicited from parents, but rather evolved when the identical interview questions were asked. If quantitative research were to follow this study, it could be assumed that the above responses would show additional strength when suggested in the format. These issues appear to be foremost in parents' minds when seeking educational placements for their handicapped children, since they were noted without being suggested. Mutuality of friendship was also a strong response by the handicapped students. "I have friends here," conveyed the answer of all 26 students interviewed. Less than half the interviewed students thought they had friends in the neighborhood, and those who did spoke of family members as their friends. These stated benefits of segregated placements appear appropriate to consider in educational placement decisions and certainly have parental attention. Having a handicap already detracts from human existence and is a challenge for a young person struggling to develop a healthy self concept. Parents can be understood for wanting a mutually reciprocal social peer group for their handicapped children since they view the reciprocal environment as necessary to their child's maturation.
The third research question inquired about the desire for companionship on the part of the handicapped student. Responses and observations noted that the segregated setting did provide an accepting peer group and provided opportunities for socialization and participation in school activities. Since there is persistent correlation in reported research (Beane, 1991) between participation in school life and achievement, it is appreciated that parents would desire these opportunities for their handicapped children. The students themselves give much evidence of their joy in participating in sporting and music events, and their robustness in and around the facility is often noted by visitors and observers. The balance of interaction points to the power of the environment, and hearing, "I have a friend!" supports the choice of peer-friendly environments.

The final research question sought to find out if the segregated educational setting was better for a handicapped student than an integrated educational setting. While there is not sufficient evidence to end the argument, sufficient strength was noted in the responses and observations to favor a segregated setting for handicapped students. This was well summarized by one parent who said, "As they get older, the difference between what they can do and what kids their same age can do increases and they are no longer
interested in each other." Many parents gave examples even of siblings who willingly played with their handicapped sibling when younger, but only did it out of obligation/love as they grew up. They wondered how the educational community could expect more from a school population, then they could from their own children in their own homes.

The development of independence was also spoken about when comparing the segregated setting to the integrated setting. Without the discrepancy between the "normal" population and the handicapped students always being a part of the environment, as it is in the integrated educational setting, parents felt their handicapped students could function more openly and freely in the total environment, developing independent skills. This concept was reinforced by special education administrators who are receiving pressure to close centralized special education settings and integrate all handicapped students. They spoke about their fears for the handicapped students in the segregated settings and that some separation would remain necessary thus reducing independent movement of the handicapped students. Since skills in independence are basic to later community interdependent skills (Covey, 1989), parents are justified in valuing a setting which promotes the development of independent skills in their handicapped children.
Parents of handicapped students are really not asking for anything more than what all parents want for their children. They want a safe, peer-accepting environment preparing their handicapped children for adulthood. The difference for these parents is that the regular education setting impacts the vulnerabilities of the handicapped students making their development socially and functionally more difficult, while supporting the development of the "normal" population. Discrepancy in skill development will be a reality for handicapped students. Accepting this reality is difficult. Participating in an educational setting that spotlights the discrepancies daily appears unnecessary.
CONCLUSIONS

This research study was limited by a lack of randomization and small sample size. However, the results of this study begin to identify perceptions regarding the educational placement of special education students. The goal of this research was to voice these perceptions so that administrators in key positions in educational settings will have access to this additional information.

The dilemmas faced in this less than perfect world demand that we avoid simplistic solutions to human problems. Rather, there is need to encourage each other and to welcome additional perceptions beyond our own, knowing that perceptions govern how we behave.

Segregation or separation has an onerous reputation and can therefore be emotionally disdained very quickly. Perhaps instead of tangling the pros and cons of educational settings, the emphasis could be placed on where the student can best develop and learn; on what characteristics are necessary in the environment for the student to be available for learning.

Living is an art; a constant weaving between advantages and disadvantages. Cognitively restricted persons can be understood for feeling overwhelmed by regular education settings and being unmotivated towards learning. While

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educators can do little to enlarge the cognitive abilities with which a person is born, they are responsible for the external environments they build and create. Empirical research with the handicapped students themselves and their families voiced dissatisfaction with integrated settings and that dissatisfaction alone is enough to warrant attention.

This research aimed at giving a voice to the parents of handicapped children who have chosen a segregated education setting for their handicapped child when the education profession is moving towards mainstreaming and integration. The intensity of these parents and their perceptions regarding educational placements needs to be understood. The interviews and observations uncovered the parents continuing desire for their handicapped children to become as independent as possible. These are not parents who want to hide their handicapped children and yet they have chosen a segregated education placement. Their reasons for this choice are worth knowing.

These parents wanted their children to be comfortable, happy if possible, willing to go to school, have friends who were mutually reciprocal in their interactions and to develop and learn. They viewed these goals as possible in the segregated setting. They did not view these goals as possible in most integrated settings where the discrepancy between peers and their handicapped child was constantly
evident. They especially noted that as the child aged, the discrepancies became more of a problem for interactions between peers, their handicapped child became more isolated and self-esteem diminished. To counteract that negative process in their handicapped child’s life, they sought a segregated setting, especially as the handicapped child reached their teen years, so that they would have reciprocal friendships and remain involved in living. This research seeks to have these parents heard and they themselves participated in the research with that goal.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Choose educational settings for handicapped students that are comfortable for both the student and the families of the handicapped student. Handicaps impact human dignity and environments are crucial to building inner resources needed later in life by the handicapped adult.

2. Note whether a handicapped student will participate in school activities in the educational setting of choice. Participation and involvement is school life for a student and without mutuality of interaction with peers, a student’s development diminishes.

3. Focus on the amount of independence a handicapped student will have in the educational setting. If the entire setting is not conducive and safe for the complete independent movement of the handicapped student, question the choice of setting.

4. The discrepancy in cognitive abilities and social skills between the handicapped student and the population of the educational setting needs to be carefully scrutinized. If the discrepancy is large or uncomfortable
for the handicapped student the environment will impact on the handicapped student negatively rather than positively. This is not the goal of education.

5. Future research would aid educational administrators by additionally observing and reporting on the impact of educational settings for handicapped students, both segregated and integrated. Administrators are often in key decision making positions regarding the choice of educational settings for handicapped students. Empirically based and documented research would assist administrators in these decisions.

6. Caution needs to be voiced regarding confusing segregated educational settings with segregation of persons based on race. Educational settings need to be chosen for the possibilities they offer handicapped students in mutuality of peers and intensity of instruction or training. Educational settings that are separate from regular education need not be dismissed due to educators fears of being viewed as racists, but rather should be chosen if they can impact positively on the development of the handicapped student.
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