

**PREPARING TEACHERS FOR PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES:  
EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF A SPECIFICALLY DESIGNED CURRICULUM  
ON PROFESSIONALS**

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## DOCTORAL ACCEPTANCE FORM

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dedicated to

My father Nureddin Sakalli,  
my source of inspiration in everything I do (May He rest in peace)

&

My husband Semir Gumus and our children  
Gokdeniz and Ali Emir, my never-ending supports

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## ABSTRACT

Suad Sakalli Gumus

This case study documents the curriculum building and delivery of the content of a graduate level course (K548, Families, School, and the Society) offered at Indiana University and examines the impact on teachers of a curriculum specifically designed to prepare them for effective family-professional partnerships.

Based on a preliminary study conducted in 2003, this course (K548) was restructured. This dissertation study was conducted to evaluate the impact of this restructuring on the effectiveness of the course. Data collected from field notes, interviews, and course artifacts were analyzed using constant comparative methods to analyze the impact the curriculum had on teacher learning and professional identity development in terms of partnering with families.

This dissertation study documented that the course studied had a reasonable structure because it was effective in achieving its overall goals of preparing teachers to partner with families. Overall, it could be concluded that the comprehensive course curriculum with Family Systems Theory component as a solid conceptual framework, provided the much needed direction in teacher preparation and the solid information base that could be used by others in the search for improvement of similar programs. The study facilitated the emergence of a conceptual framework related to knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for the preparation of teachers in partnering with families. Finally, the study made recommendations for future practice and pointed out the issues to be resolved in future research.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Throughout the last few decades, the US society has undergone dramatic social, economic, demographic, and cultural changes. These changes bring new challenges as they have altered the function of schools and the roles and needs of various parties involved in schools. In addition to the new professional role expectations that these changes have brought, the rising number of federal and state mandates and policies have increased the demands on both teachers and families. As the needs and expectations change, methods for meeting them to provide an optimal education for students have expanded and become more complex. The recent changes surrounding school practice require collaboration among school personnel and students' families. It is impossible to realize the new educational aspirations and meet the new standards without these involved parties recognizing each other's expertise and being responsive to the interests and concerns of each other.

In order to carry out effective practices that promote partnerships with families, teachers now need to have a better understanding of school/family dynamics. They must have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be able to partner with families to serve their students effectively. Because teachers play a central role in connecting school, families, and the society and in promoting partnerships among involved parties, they need to be prepared to initiate partnerships and support families.

With the realization of extended teacher roles, an understanding of how we should prepare teachers for effective family-professional partnerships has become greatly valued in higher education. Teacher educators know that they must convey to teachers important legal mandates. Teacher education programs must be structured in a way to prepare teachers for complying with these mandates. An aspect that often has been overlooked, however, is the methodical techniques necessary for putting family-professional partnerships successfully into practice. Hence, research aimed at understanding the nature of effective training and ways to accomplish this training is necessary. Despite the recent advances in conceptualizing family-professional partnerships, very little has been written about supporting teachers and prospective teachers as they acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for implementation of practices that promote effective family-professional partnerships. The need for studies that examine the impact of specific programs on professionals is clear. Providing information on one university's specific model used for preparing teachers in these skills, and examining the impact of this model on professionals was at the heart of this dissertation study.

### Rationale for the Study

Throughout my coursework at Indiana University-Bloomington (IU) I have gained valuable insight into the importance of family-professional partnerships. I also have seen examples of effective partnerships with families at the higher education level because some of the graduate courses employ partnership methods such as having family members of students with special needs as guest speakers, requiring teachers to do field experiences with families who have a member with a disability, and having some of these



family members participate in graduate level courses as co-instructors. I came to understand that in order to help teachers gain a better understanding of what family-professional partnerships entail, help them realize the true value of partnering with families, and to prepare them to support the development of constructive family-professional partnerships in special education, it was imperative that personnel preparation programs look beyond the activities embedded in a course or even in a series of courses that provide information about the best practices and to also model partnerships themselves.

Holt-Reynolds, 1992 (p.347) reminds us how important it is for teacher educators to model the “very principles that we are teaching teachers to employ.” In other words, I realized the importance of teacher family internships and the value of including family members in curriculum development and course instruction. Yet, I knew these experiences were not always components of personnel preparation and an important way to promote these practices in the field would be to document the impact of these practices through systematic research. As I started teaching undergraduate and graduate level courses, I noticed that teachers often came into our programs with very limited understanding of the nature of real partnerships with families. The results of a study my colleagues and I conducted in 2003 regarding the Families course confirmed my initial impression and documented the lack of real understanding of effective family-professional partnerships among the families and teachers who participated in that study. Barton, Drake, Perez, St Louis, and George (2004) have similar findings that there is a lack of cohesion in the understanding and definition of the interactions among families,

professionals and researchers which also existed in the literature on parental involvement and family-professional relationships.

In addition, I have seen that teachers who come into our programs had misconceptions such as “some families don’t care or don’t value education” about families. Wang and O’Dell (2002, p. 505) point to the fact that little attention has been given to the assumptions teachers bring into teacher education about “teaching and learning in actual situations.” My experiences teaching professionals made me realize how important it was to challenge these teachers’ misconceptions and make sure that they had positive dispositions for working with families.

Through conversations with colleagues based on analyses of the data of the 2003 study as well as the meetings conducted to plan the subsequent 2005 Families course, I also came to realize the major role that the structure and delivery methods of a course could play in challenging teachers’ pre-established attitudes and providing them with opportunities to negotiate new meanings from the course content and requirements. Therefore, by documenting the process of course development and instruction (content building, delivery of the content, and response of teachers to the deliberately designed activities) I believed that I would do a much-needed service to the field. I was providing the research needed to promote a better understanding of these complex processes and was documenting the use of a model that might be used by other teacher education programs and family studies researchers. Further, documenting the development of these teachers with regard to family-professional partnerships (in terms of attitudes, skills, and knowledge) by exploring the philosophies they bring into the program, how these are formulated, changed, and enhanced through this preparation into the pedagogy they will

eventually use in their practices will provide conclusive evidence of the impact of this course.

### My Involvement in the Families Course

In the fall of 2001 I took the Families Course at IU as a course work requirement for my Master's degree. I came to realize how important it was to look at special education from a child development perspective and to understand Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). After I decided to pursue my doctorate in special education with the goal of working in higher education, my interest in teacher education became clearer. As I decided to concentrate on Early Intervention / Early Childhood education and Mild disabilities with a minor in Teacher Education for my doctorate, I felt that it was important to prepare teachers to work with families. During my second year in the doctoral program a professor in the department, Dr. Gretchen Butera, decided to launch an extensive investigation of the perspectives of stakeholders (teacher educators, teachers, and families) in the Families course that was offered in Fall 2003 to learn about family-professional partnerships and professional preparation for those partnerships. One of Dr. Butera's intentions was to use this information in curriculum building for future offerings of this course. She also invited doctoral students to join the study group and I decided to join. I was especially involved in data collection with families and teachers because I had taken the lead in the "family perspectives on family-professional partnerships" part of the study. Data were collected throughout the Fall 2003 course and analyses were done in Spring 2004 after the course ended.

In addition, a historical review of the course was done, which involved interviews with the originator of the course, Dr. Susan Klein. This historical review drew my

attention to the fact that the Families course had been offered for over two decades at IU. Despite this being an innovative course, there were literally no comprehensive studies that documented the content selection process used by instructors. As we conducted our data analysis during 2004 and began to plan subsequent sections of the course, we concentrated on restructuring the curriculum of the course to be offered in 2005. Our initial study provided us with information regarding what should be taught in such a course and how this content should be delivered to the teachers (see section in Chapter 4 Lessons Learned from 2003 Study, and Chapter 5 Curriculum Building for K548). Based on the information gained, we aligned the readings, activities (forum discussions and vignette journals), the family project (requirements for the field experience and family project journal), and term papers to make our curriculum coherent. The undertaking of lining up the various course components had been suggested by teachers, instructors, and family members who were involved in the Fall 2003 course and who participated in our 2003 study.

We also tried to ensure that what families wanted teachers to learn about and what teachers felt that they need to be trained in were all addressed in the restructured course. Therefore, I decided to conduct this subsequent study to examine the impact of the restructured course on teachers as well as to document the process of content building and the process of course delivery. The results of this study will provide a framework that could be used as a model for similar courses by other teacher education programs to prepare teachers in the family-professional partnerships domain.

## Overview of the Study

This research focused on the growth and development of special education teachers who participated in a graduate level course, Families in School and Society (K548), which aimed at preparing teachers for family-professional partnerships in order to foster effective family-professional relationships in schools. The course had been offered at IU for over two decades. It was restructured in 2004-2005 based on the information gained from a preliminary study conducted in the fall of 2003 (see description of the study in Chapter 4). The restructured course offered in the Fall 2005 was the focus of this study. Three sections of the course were offered online, each with four face-to-face meetings. A total of 51 students from three different sites in Indiana were enrolled in these course sections. As with most Masters level courses in this program, the majority of the students were in-service teachers (see Table 1 in appendixes for background information of all 51 teachers in the course).

This dissertation study had two main purposes: (1) to track and document the process of curriculum building for this Families course throughout the restructuring process; (2) to examine the impact on teachers of a curriculum specifically designed to prepare them for family-professional partnerships. Conceptual strategies found to be effective in earlier course sections in preparing teachers were used again in the course. These included the use of vignettes representing common family/school situations, the incorporation of family members as co-instructors, structured class discussions focused on teachers' real life experiences, field experiences with actual families, and journaling about these experiences. The course content was structured in three main interconnected sections: (1) families (Family Systems Theory as it applies to teachers' family of origin

and the families of their students); (2) school (teacher roles at schools and current practices in family-professional partnerships); and (3) society (how families and schools as systems function in the broader system of society, resources available for families and professionals in different segments of society, and the impact of social realities on the functioning of families).

Multiple data sources were used to document and describe the experiences of teachers and involved families. With the data and results of the 2003 preliminary study at hand to begin with, my dissertation data consisted of (1) notes I took during the weekly planning meetings with instructors of all three sections of the course and co-instructor family members during the restructuring process before we offered the course and during the course in Fall 2005; (2) notes I took during the four face-to-face 2005 class sessions with all three course sections at the three different sites; (3) artifacts accumulated in the online environment by all 51 students in three sections during Fall 2005; and (4) information I collected through interviews with key participants (5 teachers, 3 project families, 3 co-instructor family members) after the course ended.

Teachers' responses to course activities in the online environment and in our face-to-face meetings were analyzed in order to understand how they negotiated new meanings from the content presented to them and to check the extent to which the goals set for each activity had been accomplished. Analysis of the course artifacts were used partly for triangulation purposes to ensure the credibility of findings from the data I collected from interviews with key participants and notes from my observations of the four face-to-face class meetings and the weekly planning meetings with instructors/family co-instructors. In other words, I continuously compared and contrasted

my interpretation of the course data with what key participants (families and teachers) stated about their experiences and what was said in weekly planning meetings by family co-instructors and instructors.

As an observer who had been involved in the preparation of instructional materials and every aspect of the planning processes of the course, I primarily concentrated on describing the reactions of the teachers to the various deliberately planned curricular experiences. These included discussions of the vignettes (snapshots of real or imaginary family stories), reactions to stories presented by family co-instructors, the discussions that were focused on required course readings, and reactions to course participants' experiences with their Family Projects. All these components primarily focused on how families function in the society, how disability impacts this functioning, and how factors of social functioning and disability influence families' relationships with professionals. The main goal of the course was to help teachers see things and think about them from the perspective of families of students with disabilities. Another goal was to help them apply newly taught perspectives to their actions as professionals in the classroom.

Although I was not actively involved in teaching the course, I took part in the whole team planning process and was allowed to have input into the design of course activities and assignments. I was engaged in all of the professional decision-making processes and had access to all online discussions, journals, submitted assignments, and all other course materials. I also had the privilege of joining the discussions and sending postings. Although I occasionally contributed to discussions, I opted not to send any postings to avoid imposing my own agenda on the course and collected data. I wanted to

stay neutral rather than drive the discussions in a certain way that might have interfered with the data.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

In order to support my inquiry with relevant research, identify the areas in need of research, and determine the direction my study would take, I chose the following questions to guide my literature review:

1. Why school practice requires a new approach to collaboration with families?
2. What is a family-professional partnership? (Why partnership instead of involvement? Why partnerships with whole families instead of just with parents?)
3. Why prepare teachers in family-professional partnerships?
4. What is the current state of teacher education in preparing professionals for family-professional partnerships?
5. What does research tell us about the efficacy of family-professional partnership preparation practices in teacher education programs?

### *American Schools in a Climate of Change*

Social, economic, and demographic changes in the past few decades have transformed American society. These include increasing cultural, racial and linguistic diversity; widening gap between social classes due to the mounting income inequalities; rising individualism; and changing roles in the labor market. Research indicates that such societal changes have substantially altered family patterns (Bianchi & Spain, 1996; Casper & Bianchi, 2002; Ruggles, 1997; Keyes, 2002; Thornton & Young-Demarco, 2001). DeFrain and Olson (1999) and Keyes (2002) report that American families

currently are not the traditional nuclear families that existed in the past. These studies also show that the lifestyles of families, responsibilities of family members, work patterns of family members, methods of child rearing, and the functioning of family units are very different from what they used to be. It follows that these transformations require schools to alter their role and their relationships with families in order to be compatible with the changing expectations, roles, needs, and qualities of all parties involved in education.

Families and schools now expect each other to assume many roles besides their traditional roles (Butera et al., 2005). Families are expected to be more involved in every aspect of their children's educational careers. Families are expected to contribute to their children's schooling. In this sense home is recognized as a continuation of schools in a broader context. On the other hand, schools currently are not only expected to teach children, they also are expected to ameliorate disparities in educational resources among diverse (social, economic, educational, and cultural) groups. School personnel are to make sure that regardless of their background, all students are prepared for life both at school and at home. Thus, schools are to provide services that extend beyond the traditional focus on academic learning during the school day. (Butera et al., 2005, Sakalli Gumus, 2008).

With the American society becoming increasingly diverse along economic, cultural, linguistic, racial, and sexual orientation lines, the population teachers are dealing with has changed dramatically. These transformations require change in the methods used in meeting the range of student needs. Rising accountability demands also have altered the functioning of schools by extending their roles and altering their relationships with families (Polloway, Patton, & Serna, 2005). It becomes clear that for efforts in meeting

these demands to be successful, schools, families and communities must work closely together, using all available resources wisely, to optimize the education of modern students.

In addition to the demographic changes mentioned above, the increase in the number of students identified with special needs and at risk as well as the shifting paradigms in special education that came with new understandings of child development (see “The Case for Moving Beyond Involvement and the Legislative Foundations for Family-Professional Partnerships in Special Education” in this chapter) have changed the educational terrain. Fore example, the full inclusion movement now demands that schools move away from student hierarchies and toward equal status and positive outcomes for all children.

These new circumstances call for families to actively participate in the educational processes and work collaboratively with school personnel. Similarly, changes in the circumstances surrounding schooling require professionals to understand the ways families and communities contribute to children’s learning and recognize the value of family-professional partnerships to support the education of children. The undeniable role of families in children’s schooling continues to be emphasized in legal mandates and recent research, and the changed conditions demand that families and schools must view each other as partners (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). Educational policy, as well as state and federal legislation, support and encourage the formation of family-professional and community partnerships in order to ensure that school practices are compatible with the students’ backgrounds (Epstein, 2001; Osher & Osher, 2002).

Despite the evidence from research pointing to the fact that school and home should not function separately and families have equally important role in these relationships, it hasn't been always easy to develop and maintain relationships that are based on partnership approach. The nature of relationships between home and school changed over time. This, in part, happened due to the change in how we understand constructive relationships between home and school and the roles of involved parties in certain period of times as the social, cultural, and economic conditions in specific time periods affect our expectations and role construction. In the next section I will review the school-home relationships literature and discuss how our understanding of these relationships, the perceived roles of involved parties, the execution of these roles, and the expectations of involved parties changed over time.

### *The Transformation of Family-Professional Relationships and Roles*

To demonstrate the change in our understanding of family-professional relationships and the shift in roles of these parties in a historical progression, I have reviewed the school-home relationships literature (Angelides, Theophanous & Leigh, 2006; Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2004; Cairney, 1995; Cairney, 2002; Keyes, 2002; Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald, Land, & Luke, 2003; Sumsion, 1999) and came to see that there have been three periods where these relationships and roles understood and executed differently: 1970's and prior which I named the "traditional relationship period", 1980's-late 1990's which I named the "deficit model period", and late1990's-present which I named the "partnership model period". Of course this divide does not strictly separate time periods where each model solely practiced, but rather aims to highlight the practice that marked the period with

transitions across periods where use of more than one approach could be observed. For example, the “late 1990’s-present” period is still a transition period where we commonly see the “deficit model” still being practiced besides the efforts to promote the “partnership” model. Therefore, this divide is used only to provide a scheme that will help the reader visualize the progression of change in this context. Using this scheme, I will provide an overview of how our understanding of family-professional relationships changed overtime and what is different now with the “partnership” approach.

Until the early 80’s, school and home were two separate entities and families did not interfere with school practices of professionals at all. Good school-home relationships meant a separation of roles and functions. During this period, teachers were seen as the authority at school and always right about educational matters whereas families were the authority at home with the role of raising respectful citizens/students living the academic aspect of education to schools. The most commonly held belief is best characterized by the saying “His flesh is yours and his bones are mine” meaning that families trust teachers with their practices for their child and give them the authority to do anything it takes to educate that child during that period without questioning what they do.

The next trend that was evident in the literature was where families were seen as necessary for schools but their involvement in educational matters was controlled by school’s agenda. In this period schools wanted to attract parents to school in order to assist schools in reaching their goals (Cairney, 2002). Families also wanted to know more about their children’s education and support them. However, naturally schools did not get similar responsiveness from all parents due to different factors. Therefore a tendency to categorize parents (such as good parents, responsive parents, involved parents, and not so

good parents, unresponsive parents, uninvolved parents...) started to appear in the literature. One further development that could be seen in the literature is that the increase in research looking at how these so called “not so good parents, non-responsive parents, or uninvolved parents” could be “fixed” (providing more education on topics such as parenting, homework, literacy, math etc.; interventions using different parental involvement programs etc.) to meet the expectations of schools, fit in the scheme created by schools and comply with what schools want them to do in order to reach the goals created by schools. Initiatives during this period were mostly school initiated efforts to support parents and provide them with information to comply with the school agendas rather than seeking a genuine partnership (Cairney, 1995; Cairney, 2002) and attract parents (parental involvement, parental engagement, parental participation) to school in order to help professionals educate their children better. During this period, distrust between home and school started to develop and both sides started to blame each other for the differential achievements of students and schools. As a result this deficit model approach to home-school relationships created a snowball effect in terms of how both parties view each other negatively and in most cases are not able to develop and maintain partnership relationships. This approach also created disparity among families in terms of outcomes, I believe. Families who had cultures compatible with the school culture, who were already engaged, who knew how to utilize the resources of the system to the benefit of their children had even more access to schools and professional whereas families who were seen as disengaged by schools got distanced more as they did not know how to defend their rights and utilize the resources in the system. Therefore the relationships

were exclusive only for privileged few parents rather than reaching out to all families regardless of background and needs.

In recent years, with the mounting accountability demands on both home and school to ensure student achievement (academic and social), the need to review these relationships to overcome this deficit model is sparked and efforts to bring the “partnership” model have been fueled. Research focus in the field has shifted towards finding “what is wrong in these relationships and how can we get them to be more constructive?” Research findings point to the fact that families should be valued as they are (being responsive to who they are rather than trying to fix them) and should be worked with as equal partners in order to accomplish the goals (academic and social) together in mutual partnerships. This approach requires school and home environments to be seen as a continuum of each other in the systems context as they function together to create better outcomes for students.

Earlier understandings of family involvement meant a focus on changing the behaviors of parents and the ways they interact with school, teachers, and their children to fit the school’s expectations. On the other hand, the new family-professional partnership approach promotes mutual understanding among involved parties. It urges professionals to account for the impact families have on child development and learning as well as on schooling. It implies merging forces with families for better outcomes for students. The nature of these relationships clearly has moved from unidirectional (based solely on professionals’ vision) and limited engagement in which only a privileged few families join, towards partnership with all families based on equality in roles and power (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). The roles of the families in educational matters and their

influence in these matters have changed drastically with the support of legislative foundations and new understandings of the impact families have on their children's development. Now families are members of advisory boards, they participate in program development and evaluation, they are viewed as life-long teachers of their children at home and as informed partners with the school, and are recognized as lobbyists and advocates who can be very powerful before boards of education (Bodner-Johnson & Sass-Lehrer, 1999). These changed views subsequently have great implications in terms of policies. Family involvement is no longer just an effort made by professionals to attract families to schools, but it refers to a broader role that accounts for families' input in a child's education. That is why having partnerships with families is viewed as an essential and bi-directional relationship rather than just contributions by families to schools.

Based on this new understanding of the value of families, the new look at the nature of these relationships from different lenses, and the need to reconstruct the roles of involved parties altering expectations to fit these conditions, we have developed a partnership model where teacher educators, families, and teachers worked together in order to achieve genuine partnerships. With the awareness that there is no one way that families get involved in their child's education or establish relationships with professionals and that such relationships will heavily depend on the characteristics of each individual engaged in them, I do not want to provide a clear-cut definition of family-professional partnerships as I believe this would narrow the focus of teacher education obscuring the complexity of these relationships we are trying to promote. However, to help the reader make sense of what we are trying to accomplish and for the purpose of



clarifying what have changed in our understanding of these relationships outlining the direction we are heading for usability of the model by others, I will provide a frame of our model preserving the flexibility for change in individual cases and different contexts: This model provides both professionals and families a common ground where they could discuss their differences and similarities, share their visions and expectations, share their problems and the way they envision the solutions to these problems, voice their concerns and needs, and come up with a mutual understanding of each other, each other's worth in and contribution to these relationships, each other's contribution to the development of the child. This family-centered approach also helps professionals and families move away from blaming each other towards taking individual responsibility so that every one is an equal part of the team and have equal role to contribute to the partnership. In this approach, each team member's opinions and suggestions warrant equal attention from the team. While each team member's point of view is unique, the partnership approach demands that no member's opinion receive greater attention simply because of that member's position. This means that status must take second place to respect for individual ideas if partnerships are to succeed.

Considering the curriculum building processes for this course and the decisions made to achieve competencies deemed to be necessary for establishing genuine relationships among families and professionals through deliberately designed activities, the building blocks of these relationships we were trying to promote could be depicted as:

bi-directional communication/facilitators of dialog, know when to lead/when to be the supporter/when to be the facilitator/and when to be the receiver as needs arise, open to constructive criticism, respect and understanding of self

/others/differences, commitment, good listening skills, responsiveness to each other's needs, being proactive rather than reactive (trying to find solutions to possible issues before they arise), shifting from self-preservation to sharing power (in terms of decision making) where both sides are considerate of their partners feelings and share the feeling of trust/security rather than feeling threatened by their partner, reflect on their views of/relations with their partners, seeing the child in the center of these relationships with the mutual goal of supporting the child's achievement rather than trying to mark the relationship with their own way of dealing with issues, willingness to take risks, being able and ready to act upon unexpected circumstances.

Some of these characteristics are described in various studies as competencies that should be targeted in teacher education. Of course we recognize that the possibilities are endless in terms of targeting a broader range of competencies and the combination of competencies that could be included in different teacher education models. We believe that we have done a good job of finding the best possible combination for this program to meet the needs of all involved parties as we reviewed the long history of the model trying to see what worked and what did not work during this long history, studied the perspectives of all stakeholders and considered their input while redesigning our model for 2005. Having explained what we are trying to accomplish through this broad and flexible scheme, in the next section I will discuss the need to establish partnerships with all involved family members rather than only parents in the context of systems theory justifying the field's move towards family-professional partnership.

### *The Theoretical Foundations of Family-Professional Partnership Notion*

The basis for this new paradigm is that all family members, including the extended family, contribute to children's learning. It is also understood that families have a great deal of knowledge and expertise about their children's development (Bodner-Johnson & Sass-Lehrer, 1999). Fitzsimmons (2003) points to the value of the insight families possess about their children due to the intimate and long-term nature of the relationship families and children hold with each other. Family members' thorough understanding of the child's household, community, and cultural environment also contribute to this expertise.

This new understanding of the value of families as experts regarding their children is gaining support as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1989) is understood and espoused in the field of education. This theory looks at child development within the context of relationships that form a child's environment. The theory defines complex layers of environment, each of which has an impact on the child's development (<http://pt3.nl.edu/paquetteryanwebquest.pdf>). Two of the most immediate layers described as having the greatest impact on child development are family and school.

Paired with this understanding of the multi-layered environment and its impact on the development of the child, the life span perspective in special education has also contributed to the change in the role of families in education. The interrelatedness of the various contexts that surround the child and family implies that ongoing decisions will impact long-term quality of life issues (Winton & Bailey, 1994). Instead of a narrow focus on children's school achievement, a more holistic view that accounts for quality of

life issues requires that focus be on the child and his/her whole family (Shartrand et al., 1997; Ryan & Adams, 1995). This Family Systems perspective also emphasizes the need for teachers to understand families as complex, unique systems that affect the child and are also affected by the presence of the child (Turnbull, Summers, & Brotherson, 1984; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak, 2006). With the strong theoretical basis for partnerships with families supported by Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), Family Systems Theory (Turnbull et al., 1984; Turnbull et al., 2006), and Epstein's (1995) theory of overlapping spheres of influence of schools, families, and communities, the new approach in family-professional relationships demands that professionals should elicit information from families, work with them collaboratively, and account for differences between their own perspectives and the family's perspective instead of taking a prescriptive role in interaction with families. The following section specifically focuses on the importance of these partnerships with families and training teachers to establish and maintain such relationships in the context of special education.

*The Case for Moving Beyond Involvement and the Legislative Foundations for Family-Professional Partnerships in Special Education*

Historically, federal and state mandates have outlined an important role for families of students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) delineate an increasingly active role for families with each new reauthorization (Pretti-Frontzcak, Giallourakis, Janas, & Hayes, 2002). Of the six key principles at the core of special education federal mandates, for example, two (due process and parental participation about informing and involving families in decision-making) directly relate to parent-school partnerships. In addition, the need to individualize learning plans in the

individual education plan (IEP) process for students with disabilities requires that special educators partner with families in order to design activities that are personally meaningful for their students and relevant to the family's daily life.

Besides meeting the legislative mandates, in special education the importance of partnering with families is especially blatant due to the complex roles of professionals must engage in to meet the intricate needs of students with special needs. Caring for a child with special needs, teaching him/her, and preparing such a child for life will be a little different on the part of families and teachers and the complexity of issues involved in such an endeavor will require more effort on the parts of both parties. For many years, collaborative relationships between families and professionals have been regarded as an essential component of the education of students with disabilities. However, the nature of these relationships has been changing over time from parental involvement to family involvement and a step further to the concept of family-professional partnerships rather than mere interaction.

With the shift in the role of teachers from the traditional model in which teachers were dominant, made decision exclusive of family input, and assumed the full responsibility for educating students with special needs toward teachers being partners with other professionals and families, it becomes necessary for special educators to gain a new understanding of the value of their potential partners. In special education, family involvement is no longer a matter of simply having the parents participate in educational planning via the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process nor having the parents volunteer in fundraising events (Butera et al., 2005; Epstein, 1995; Weiss, Kreider, Levine, Mayer, Stadler & Vaughan, 1998). Teachers must develop an awareness of

environmental influences such as the family's role in the child's learning in order to enhance their ability to support student learning in environments other than school (CEC, 1998). The need to individualize teaching and learning for students with disabilities require special educators to partner with families to design activities that are personally meaningful for each student and relevant to each student's daily life within their families. Awareness of family strengths will also assist teachers in utilizing families as a valuable resource to meet the child's needs. In the school setting working with families requires special educators to have knowledge, interaction skills, and the disposition to understand and value differences in family backgrounds and to meet the needs of each family in a personalized manner.

Further, teachers must be prepared to understand that disability is not only a physiological or mental condition, but also is influenced by the person's environment (Barnes, 2003; Sayce, 2000). Therefore, teachers need to have the knowledge of family systems and an understanding of families' role in supporting child's development (CEC, 1998; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2006). Professionals need to hear family stories directly from families to learn about how various actions or inactions have impacted their family, and about how well intentional or unintentional actions or comments did or did not have their intended effect. On the other side, parents need to hear and experience professionals' perspectives about how and why certain actions were taken, and what the limitations in their own lives as teachers might be.

### *Change in Teacher Education Context*

With the new accountability demands on and new family-centered approaches expected of teachers, the need to prepare them to have the necessary competencies to put the partnerships into practice became evident. Professional teacher organizations recognized the need for teachers to develop skills to involve families in their children's learning. The National Parent Teacher Association (1997) set family involvement as an organizational goal and created national standards for school family involvement programs. More than 30 other organizations, including the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the American Federation of Teachers, have agreed to uphold these standards. Many national associations that either accredit or set standards for teacher preparation programs such as NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) and NASDTEC (National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification), have recently added or strengthened indicators aimed at family-professional partnerships (Casper, 2001). For example, the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards has included competencies related to working with families in its standards and one of the mandated guidelines by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment Consortium (INTASC) for new teachers is the ability to, “foster relationships with school colleagues, parents and agencies in the larger community to support student learning and well-being” (INTASC Standards, 1998). Consequently, the significance of preparing teachers to partner with families as a key aspect of effective teaching is also recognized in higher education. A new initiative by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and the National PTA aims to provide pre-service and in-service teacher training in family-professional partnerships.

With the research pointing to the fact that collaboration with families and communities has an impact on both the child's development and educational achievement (Caplan, Hall, Lubin, & Fleming, 1997; Epstein, 1994; Fullan, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hickman, 1999), teacher preparation programs are expected to consider this trend in training future teachers so they possess the necessary competence to be successful in partnering with families. Thus, the ability to build relationships with diverse families, colleagues, and other members of the community becomes an essential part of teacher competence. Teacher preparation programs have started to offer courses that aim to prepare teachers in working effectively with families and many teacher educators have expressed their plans to strengthen such programs according to recently reported surveys (Epstein, 2001; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). However, these surveys indicate that teacher preparation for work with families has not yet reached the ideal level to promote effective partnerships. Training for work with families is often limited in the scope of content and in teaching methods. Clearly, teachers need concrete skills, knowledge, and positive attitudes towards working with families in order to effectively engage in partnerships (Burton, 1992; Edwards & Jones Young, 1992). Despite recognition of these needs, most teachers still are ill-prepared by their teacher training to work constructively with families (Chavkin, 1991; Epstein, Walker, & Singer, 1993; Senne, 2005; Shartrand et al., 1997). This lack of teacher preparation for working with families in schooling efforts inevitably raises barriers to effective partnerships (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). Research shows that teacher education programs often do not adequately prepare teachers to work with families (Chavkin, 1991; Epstein, 2001; Harris, Jacobson, & Hemmer, 2004; Hiatt-



Michael, 2001; Shartrand et al., 1997). For example, the 2004-2005 Met Life Survey of American Teachers reports that teachers consider engaging in work with families to be their greatest challenge and also the area they are least prepared to manage during their first year of teaching. In their 2004 action brief on the parent-involvement provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, the Public Education Network and the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education cite insufficient training of teachers as a barrier for family-professional partnerships. Lazar and Slostad (1999) and the U.S Department of Education (USDOE, 1997) similarly suggest that the failure of teacher preparation programs to adequately prepare teachers to partner with families is one of the most important obstacles for building effective family-professional partnerships.

Professional and in-service training for teachers that focuses on working with families and developing relationships is not yet widely available; nor do many pre-service programs across the country offer training for future teachers in the development of family-professional partnerships (Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000; National Council of Jewish Women, 1996). Teachers typically bear the burden of forging these relationships, and yet their training leaves most teachers ill-prepared to do so (Butera et al., 2005). Consequently, a serious discrepancy exists between teacher preparation and the types of family involvement activities that teachers are increasingly being expected to perform in schools. Recent research indicates that currently nearly half of the nation's new teachers report that they do NOT involve parents regularly in their classrooms (Meister & Melnick 2003). The situation is scarcely better in special education where notions of best practice emphasize parent partnerships even more rigorously (Fiske and Ladd 2000).

Patrikakou and Weissberg (1999) state that teachers are "... the glue that hold the home/school partnerships together" (p.36). If this is true, then attention to teacher preparation for building family/professional relationships is critical. It cannot be assumed that teachers will naturally know how to work with families effectively. Evidence indicates that teachers must be trained to promote effective family-professional partnerships for such partnerships to occur. Bodner-Johnson and Sass-Lehrer (1999) state that regardless of the various ways available for parents and teachers to interact with each other concerning a child's learning and school experiences, effective school practice that promotes family-professional partnerships depends on how supportive teachers are of this kind of relationship. Therefore, it is important that teacher education programs equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to help them develop positive attitudes towards families and collaborate with them as equal partners (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2002).

### *The Need for Research in Family-Professional Partnerships*

Clearly, changes in the way parties that are involved in children's education interact with each other, the changes in societal and individual needs, and the shift in educational approaches toward a holistic look at the child in the environmental context have implications for personnel preparation. Currently, teacher education has already taken on the responsibility for preparing teachers in family-professional partnership and has answered the call to action by creating courses that focus on collaboration between teachers and families. Yet, very little research has taken place that investigates the

curricular means used, the course content building for this type of preparation, and the outcomes of these efforts.

### *The Need for a Framework and a Research Base in the Field*

While families and schools share the common mission of educating children, they do not share the same vision of how to accomplish this goal by working towards it together. Qualitative research has demonstrated that, despite sharing the belief that family-professional partnership is a worthy objective, parents, teachers, and school administrators have very different ideas about what these partnerships mean in the day-to-day life of schools and families, and different ideas about how to achieve their goals (Barton, Drake, Perez, St Louis, & George, 2004). This results in inherent tensions in the roles and responsibilities of parties involved (National Council of Jewish Women, 1996). Blue-Banning et al.(2004) draw attention to the fact that the lack of empirical understanding of the components of interpersonal partnerships bring about failure in developing collaborative partnerships between families and professionals. They assert that a clear understanding of what family-professional partnership means by all involved parties will lead to more harmonious work among them.

With the goal of preparing highly qualified teachers who will carry out their roles effectively, personnel preparation programs also suffer from the same lack of empirical framework that will enable them to identify what competencies they need to address in their programs and how to develop these competencies in order to prepare professionals in this domain. This situation calls for the establishment of a comprehensive framework that is supported by research and the enhancement of the available knowledge base defining the concept of family professional partnership, explaining the rationale behind

its practice from the perspectives of all involved, and informing us about the different variables to be considered in establishing and promoting these partnerships. Such a framework and knowledge base will provide the field with a common understanding of the direction the field moving in, will help establish a common goal for training, research, and practice, will help identify the actions needed to be taken to accomplish the overall goal identified, and will help the establishment of a clear research agenda. Such an establishment will also help the field in overcoming the gap between theory and practice by facilitating practical and valid guidance for all parties involved.

Having a well-grounded teacher education program that has a definitive framework will also have recognizable benefits for its students. For example, it will be clear to the students what new skills they will learn and what competencies they will develop that will help them in establishing and maintaining partnerships with their students' families, that will enhance their practices and their students' well being. They will have a better understanding of the new trend in family-professional relationships and will learn to align their practices with this new understanding.

#### *The Need for Research in Teacher Education*

The education of teachers in family-professional relations is not a newly emerging topic. However, the body of research in how we prepare teachers for family-professional partnerships could be described as being at an early stage of development. Two specific characteristics that point to this conclusion about the early stage of development are: the lack of linkages between research, theory, and practice, and the limitations of methodology for researching the impact of specific models. What is to be taught and how, and how to ensure that what we teach is being put into practice in the field are still

not clear. Second, we still don't have the tools to measure or understand how effective teacher education programs that offer such training have been in preparing teachers in this domain. This lack of empirical understanding of variables that we need to consider while creating curriculums for teacher education and the lack of methods for evaluation of the impact of such programs on professionals impedes the development of personnel preparation programs that promote effective practices for fostering partnerships between families and professionals (Winton, 2000) and programs that encourage understanding and sensitivity across increasingly diverse cultures represented among families and professionals in special education (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lynch & Hanson, 1998; Sileo & Prater, 1998). Personnel preparation programs have the potential to change the way that teachers interact with families through teacher education and should aim to be successful in doing so. Therefore, research on the effectiveness of such programs is crucial for the establishment of the knowledge base desirable to support the work in this developing field.

Moreover, as the nature of professional-family interactions changes new research that examines and explains the change identifying what is to be taught to meet the changing needs, and that measures the effectiveness of such programs is needed to keep the research and practice aligned. With the rapidly changing terminology in this developing field, such research will also help all parties involved to keep up with such changes, have a common understanding of what is expected of them and how they can put it into practice. In my literature review, when I searched the term "family-professional partnership and teacher education" most of the results were describing traditional parental involvement practices rather than partnership relations. It is clear that

there is a need for new studies that examine the changes happening in the field, providing information about the new terminology and the impact of such changes on practice.

Further, in-depth reviews of individual personal preparation programs examining the quality and the outcomes of the programs are needed to develop more conclusive evidence to support the development of successful teacher preparation methods and help the field overcome the fragmentation in what we need to teach and the way in which students learn about family-professional partnerships. Despite a number of national teacher education program surveys that have been released, most teacher education programs offering a family involvement curriculum have not been rigorously evaluated to determine their effect on the teachers they prepare. As a result, comprehensive change strategies that are used to prepare teachers in family-professional partnership and different approaches to “how we do this” have not been evaluated and researched to the extent that would be desirable to understand both the complex process of curricular models and the outcomes of these efforts. Assessing the effectiveness of teacher education in preparing teachers for family professional partnership is a critical challenge confronting Teacher Education programs. Research that examines curricular models in use and the impact of different types of training on professionals and families as partners in higher education is greatly needed.

Qualitative studies that scrutinize how involved parties understand partnership, the reasons behind specific practices, and the effectiveness of different ways of preparing teachers in this domain are scarce and greatly needed for the establishment of a knowledge base for effective teacher preparation practices. Research is essential for the quality of teacher education programs to understand their students’ needs and their

impact on them. A well-defined program with sustainable benefits is often the one that involves development and refinement over time. The continuous fine-tuning of such programs that is rooted in reliable research is a great need for success. To learn the thoughts and feelings of those targeted and to meet their needs, complex and systematic studies are necessary. Evaluation is an important tool for maintaining the quality of any program.

My review of relevant literature revealed: (1) a lack of clear definition of family-professional partnerships, (2) an ambiguity about what is to be addressed in personnel preparation programs and how to address such competencies to facilitate and support these partnerships, (3) a lack of comprehensive research evaluating the impact of different preparation models on professionals, and (4) a need for examination of different models of preparation processes in order to establish a reliable knowledge base that supports the search for effective ways to prepare professionals for family-professional partnerships. Identifying these gaps in research helped me build a framework for this study; that is describing in detail the model in use at one teacher education institution and how it came to the current state and examining the impact of this model on teachers based on the data analysis framework (examining the development of teachers through 3 developmental stages) I developed through my ongoing preliminary data analysis.

### *Research Questions*

Hoping to contribute to the limited research base in the areas mentioned in this chapter my goal with this study was to document the complex process of course content building and delivery of a curriculum specifically designed to prepare professionals in

family-professional partnerships. Another aim was to evaluate the impact of this model on professionals through their experiences in the course under study by exploring the outcomes of these efforts. By documenting these processes through systematic studies and by supporting our documentation with the information elicited first hand from involved parties this research will contribute to the establishment of a framework outlining the areas to be addressed in teacher education to prepare teachers in family-professional partnerships. Evaluating the impact of this specific curriculum and the delivery methods used on the professionals we prepare I also aim to help fill in the gap in research with regard to comprehensive evaluation of individual programs. My hope is that this study will enhance the knowledge base for future program evaluation studies by contributing to the empirical understanding of the processes, will provide direction for future teacher education practices, create acceleration in the discussions on teacher preparation in this domain, and add to the research base available informing stakeholders about the latest developments in the field. With these goals in mind, I developed the following questions to enable me focus my inquiry and guide my selection of methodologies:

1. What does the process of curriculum building (what competencies should be addressed, why and how) for a course that aims to prepare teachers in family-professional partnerships look like?
2. How did teachers experience the developmental stages defined by the framework created for analysis of data collected?
3. Was there any difference between the documented experiences (through course artifacts) and reported experiences (in interviews and observations)?



4. What was the nature of changes in professionals' attitudes towards family-professional partnerships?
5. How effective has this program been in accomplishing the goals set for specific course activities?
  - Changing teachers' negative preconceived views of families?
  - Creating change in teachers' self realizations, knowledge, beliefs, and practices related to their own and their students' families?
  - Changing the way teachers think about families, convey their feelings, and communicate with families?
  - Helping teachers gain an understanding of the Systems Theory and apply it to various family circumstances?
  - Helping teachers develop the ability to look at the child in a broader context (familial, societal, cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic differences)
  - Helping teachers gain an understanding of how their upbringing shapes their dispositions with regard to interactions with others?
  - Helping teachers gain cultural competence for working with families from diverse cultural backgrounds.
  - Helping teachers become more reflective on their practices and their way of thinking about others?
  - Helping teachers become more knowledgeable about working with families of students with special needs and about what effective family-professional partnerships entail and how to put it into practice?

6. How satisfied were teachers and family members with these partnerships at the teacher education level and the method of preparing professionals for partnerships? How this program could be improved to meet the needs of all involved parties better?

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methods

The purpose of this case study was to document the process of content building and instruction of a course designed to prepare teachers for family-professional partnerships and to explore the impact of this model on teachers' development. Although I am a methodological pluralist, I think the best way to understand the lived experiences of others is by using qualitative methods. Brantlinger et al., (2005) describe qualitative research as "a systematic approach to understanding qualities, or the essential nature, of a phenomenon within a particular context." I have chosen qualitative or naturalistic inquiry for this study because I was interested in understanding the experiences of teachers and how they made sense of these experiences in the context of this particular curriculum. As following Merriam's (2001) advice, I wanted to explore and understand "the meaning they have constructed" (p.6) from their experiences as they interacted with this specifically designed curriculum. The ability of qualitative inquiry to reveal "how all the parts work together to form a whole" (Merriam, 2001, p. 6) was especially appealing to me due to the complex nature of the model under study. As a collaborative team, course instructors had designed specific activities to address different competencies that teachers needed to acquire. The overall goal of the model was to create competent teachers (in terms of knowledge, skills, and dispositions) who will be able to engage in effective family-professional partnerships. Therefore, understanding how each of the components in the model worked to reach the broader goal was especially important in terms of exploring the nature and impact of the model.

I defined the qualitative inquiry method I used as a “case study” because I was interested in understanding a specific model designed and used at a specific teacher education program. Creswell (1997) defines a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case(or multiple cases) overtime through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p.61). This particular case (a course bounded by method and time) was selected to explore a specific way of preparing professionals for family-professional partnerships and the impact of this model on their development. As Schwandt (1997) suggests, I decided to study this case because I think this case is “instrumentally useful in furthering understanding of a particular problem, issue, concept, and so on” (p.13). In this situation, understanding this specific method of training teachers in family-professional partnerships and the outcomes of this method was integral to this case study and was useful in furthering the understanding the problem of “how to prepare teachers effectively for family-professional partnerships.”

#### *Participant Selection and Data Collection Procedures*

As the case study approach demands, I utilized multiple data collection methods in order to accumulate in-depth data from multiple sources. Course artifacts accumulated in the online environment created the largest portion of my data. Observation and field notes taken in planning meetings and the four face-to-face class meetings of all three sections were the second source of information collected. In June, July, and August (2005) before the class started, seven planning meetings were held with the instructors of the three sections of the course and myself in attempt to reorganize the course, develop the projects and assignments, plan for the face-to-face meetings of the course, establish

the course in the online environment, and recruit family member co-instructors. These meetings lasted approximately two- three hours each. On a meeting held on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005, two days before the first face-to-face meeting of the course on August 31, all the instructors and recruited co-instructor family members met to discuss the details about roles and responsibilities, arrange for who was going to be in which section of the course during the face-to-face meetings, and get the family members' input for the content and organization of the course. These planning meetings continued to be held throughout the semester. Eleven planning meetings, four of which were also attended by the family member co-instructors, were held between September and December 2005. I kept notes in these meetings with regard to discussions held and decisions made. Additional data collection method was semi-structured interviews conducted with the key participants, including four teachers and three of their project families and three family member co-instructors. These key participants were selected through purposeful sampling by asking for their voluntary participation. As soon as I acquired approval (see Appendix...) for my study from the Protection of Human Subjects Committee (IRB) at IUB, I posted all the forms approved by the IRB committee explaining the study and procedures to be used and a recruitment script on the course web page (oncourse). I accompanied this information with an announcement on the front page of the site to ask for participation. I also attended the second face-to-face meeting of the class in one section (Bloomington, the largest section in terms of student attendance) and asked for help from two of the family member co-instructors, each of whom attended one of the other two sections, to ask for participation of their sections in my study. The family member co-instructors were not involved in grading students, therefore the possibility of students feeling

pressured to participate in my study was eliminated. I provided a brief overview of my study, informed teachers that participating in my study would require them to meet with me for one session of 40-90 minutes for face-to-face or telephone interviews, I also told them I wanted them to ask their project families if they would be willing to talk to me for approximately the same amount of time in a telephone or face-to-face interview. If they agreed, I asked participant teachers to collect their project family contact information for me. Due to the fact that most of these teachers were working full time while also handling demanding coursework for work they were doing towards their degrees, some of them expressed their regrets for not being able to participate in my study. Many said that they wanted to do so, but could not because of time constraints. Five teachers volunteered to participate in my study and signed the consent form and agreed to ask for their project families' participation and collect contact information for me. Soon I was contacted by three of these key participants and was informed that their project families also were willing to participate in my study and I was provided with their contact information. Besides collecting data from teachers and project families as key participants, I also wanted to elicit information from co-instructor family members who were instructors and partners in this course. I invited family member co-instructors to participate in an interview after the course ended. All four co-instructor family members agreed to participate, however, I ended up with only three of these because I was not able to conduct an interview with one of them due to schedule conflicts that were the result of her dealing with some family issues.

Overall, the individuals who volunteered to participate in my study were very diverse in terms of age, experiences, residential location, and current employment status.

They also were typical of the larger sample of the whole class membership. I analyzed the artifacts (course assignments, forum postings, evaluations) of all course members. A guiding interview protocol (see Appendix...) was prepared based on the issues raised in the discussions held in planning meetings, and the objectives of my study. These protocol questions were also based on my readings of the course artifacts throughout the semester and were aimed to serve as a tool in order to elicit in-depth information from the perspectives of key participants and to clarify my ongoing interpretation of data at hand and the interactions I observed. However, during the interviews we did not necessarily follow the order of questions, but I tried mostly to listen to what participants had to say making sure I got answers to my questions through these general conversations. The interviews were audio taped in their entirety and then transcribed. In some instances, valuable discussions took place after or before the formal interview started and so I took field notes immediately after my conversation with the participant ended.

### *Participants*

The class consisted of 51 students in three sections (Bloomington, Kokomo, and Richmond). A professor and 2 doctoral students taught these three sections. The professor, Dr. Butera, had been teaching this course at IUB for three years and had taught similar courses at other universities before she came to IUB. She also had a genuine interest in the topic, which is evident in her published work. The doctoral students also had taken the course during their graduate doctoral careers and had taught it at least once earlier. As an innovation to the 2005 course, four family members who had an individual with disabilities in their family were also invited to participate in the instruction of the course as co-instructors. They shared their family stories and responded to student

postings in order to help teachers get the family perspective. In addition they provided their input into the course content and organization. In general, students in this course were already practicing teachers who had come back to school for their master's degree or for renewing their licenses. Detailed background information about all 51 teachers and their project families is provided in Table 3 and 4 in the appendixes F and G. In the following section, information about the key participants is provided.

### *Teachers*

**Tom** was at the time working in a high school setting with students who had emotional and behavioral disorders. He had been teaching for 3 years in the same setting and was working on his Master's degree in special education.

**Hale** was working on her Master's degree in Special Education. She graduated from IU in 2004 with a degree in Applied Health Science with a major in Human Development/Family Studies. She decided that she needed a break after she graduated, so she took a year off of school and got a job as a special education assistant at a local High School. It was during that time that she realized that she really wanted to be a teacher. That is why she was back at IU working on her Master's degree but at the same time still working as a special education assistant.

**Berta** was originally from Dayton, Ohio. She was licensed in Elementary Education with an endorsement in reading and a Spanish minor. This was her second year teaching on an Emergency Permit (because she did not have special education certification) within a self-contained classroom for students with emotional disabilities at



the middle school level. She took the course as a requirement for getting her license and special education certification.

**Kay** was working on her Master's degree in Special Education. She was in her fifth year of teaching. She taught language arts for three years and was in her second year teaching special education. She started her teaching career at E. Junior-Senior High School and left E. after being hired at I.C. Middle School.

**Gail** was in her first semester working on a Master's degree in special education at the Indiana University School of Education. She had been a teacher for about 10 years. Most of her teaching experiences were teaching art education in New York City. During her spare time, she also taught bicycle safety courses and taught social studies classes using a bicycle as a form of transportation in Brooklyn NY. She became very involved in a program for kids called Recycle a Bicycle (RAB) and volunteered for this program in her free time. Still living in NYC, in 1998 she did a cross-country cycle trip, from San Francisco to Washington, DC, with two RAB students that brought her through Bloomington Indiana. This community left an impression on her during that trip and she moved from NYC to Bloomington in 2000 and started teaching at a private local K-12 school. Her main teaching interests are expeditionary learning, community building, and service learning. She loves to involve students in the real world, creating learning around things that students are passionate about. Ultimately trying to help them realize how they can make a difference in the world by working together with others.

### *Project Families*

Kay's Family:

Dave and Marnie is a married white, middle-class couple and they have three biological children (a daughter and two sons). The middle child Steven has a learning disability. Kay has worked with both boys as their Language Art teacher earlier but did not know much about the family but felt comfortable enough with them

Berta's Family:

Roger and Linda are a middle white, middle-class married couple with 2 biological children and 4 other children from the earlier two marriages of Roger who are adults now. Sarah the second of the two biological children has Prader-Willi syndrome. Sarah is Berta's student this year in her self contained classroom for students with severe disabilities. Prior to having Sarah in her class Berta stated to have never heard of this disorder and she wanted to learn more and collaborate with the family to serve Sarah better.

Gail's Family:

The Busch family consists of a married couple Patty and Dave and their biological son Daniel. The son is a senior in high school. They all live together on a horse farm. The family is a white, middle-class and their son Daniel's diagnosis is Asperger's, OCD and a LD.

*Family Member Co-Instructors*

**Ellie** was a mother of 3 and her oldest had Asperger's Syndrome. At the time of the study she was a stay at home mother and her husband worked at the university. She used to work at the university as well, but quit when she had her youngest son. She had been involved in this course for 3 years and had been very willing to help in any way she

could. Since the diagnosis of her son she had become active in the local autism support group (currently holding an officer position) and volunteered at her son's schools. She had 3 boys, ages 6 (1st grade), 11 (5th grade), and 13 (8th grade) and all have IEPs. Her middle son was diagnosed with a speech delay at age of 3.5, her youngest son with a speech delay at 2 (“I noticed it sooner having seen it before”, she says) and her oldest was diagnosed in 4th grade with Asperger's Syndrome. Elizabeth reported, “While very intelligent, his social skills are severely delayed. It makes school, and life in general, difficult at times.”

**Maya** was a mother of 4 children. Her youngest, Maddy, was 7 years old and had Down Syndrome. Martha used to be an elementary school teacher but quit when she had her children and now is a stay-at-home mother. She has been involved in this course for over three years by having students for their projects with her family and during the year of the study she helped both as a co-instructor and as a project family.

**Harry** was a Project Coordinator / Research Associate for the Center on Community Living and Careers (CCLC), Indiana Institute on Disability and Community. He had spent fifteen years supporting people with disabilities, their families and support staff. Harry was a parent-to-parent representative for both IN\*SOURCE (Indiana Resource Center for Families with Special Needs Children), IPIN (Indiana Parent Information Network) and a Partner in Policymaking graduate. As the father of a son with disabilities, he had first-hand knowledge and experiences.

### *Data Analysis*

Due to my involvement in the planning of the course and my presence during the instruction, I had access to all generated responses to the course content. While the course

was in progress, I constantly reviewed my field notes and the course artifacts. This constant simultaneous preliminary review of my data in most cases led to discussions in the next planning meeting and to the generation of new interview questions for my key participants. I also started to visualize the way I would organize and analyze my data.

I was very fortunate to be so familiar with the course and its redevelopment. First, I had continuous involvement while the course was in session. I also had systematically researched the course restructuring processes that took place the previous year. I also had taken the course myself just a year before the 2003 study. Further, I was in the research group of the 2003 study and had an active role and the chance to have extensive discussions with involved colleagues. I observed the classes they thought, interviewed teachers and family members, analyzed collected data, and presented on our findings in some of the most prominent scholarly conventions in the field (Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Early Childhood Education and the American Educational Research Association's 2005 convention) having the chance to discuss our findings with other scholars in the field and exchange information on current research. Finally, I joined every meeting held for restructuring the content in preparation for offering the course in 2005. This active and ongoing involvement, I believe, strengthened my analysis. Many qualitative scholars insist that analysis should be ongoing. Stake (1995) states that, "analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p.71). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) remind readers of the importance of collecting data with substantial analysis going on simultaneously. They mention, "letting data accumulate without preliminary analysis along the way is a recipe for unhappiness, if not total disaster" (p.2). In this project I have had the chance to think

about the model under study and the data that was collected for over three years on a continuous basis previous to study the formal research of my dissertation.

### *Developing an Analytical Framework*

As I reviewed the findings from the 2003 study, reflected on the conversations with the instructors and family member co-instructors in our planning meetings for the restructuring of the 2005 course, considered the way we organized the course content I was lead to realize that we were basically targeting three developmental stages through which we expected teachers, including:

1.       **Self Realization:** Teachers were expected to develop an understanding of “self” in the context of their own family through an understanding of the Family Systems Theory, understanding their family in its social and cultural context, and understanding the impact of their upbringing on their personality, perspective, and attitudes in the context of their professional role.
  
2.       **Understanding Families:** Teachers were expected to develop an understanding of the role families play in their child’s development in the context of Systems Theory, develop an understanding of their student in his/her family context, understand their students’ families in the context of their society and culture, develop an awareness of the diversity among families, and develop positive attitudes and competencies needed to work with and cater to these families. Teachers were also expected to learn how to share power with families, be sensitive to differences in family circumstances, and learn how to initiate and support family-professional partnerships.

**3. Re-conceptualizing their professional roles in the systems context:**

Teachers were expected to develop an understanding of their role in relation to school, families, and the society as individual systems interacting with each other and gain the skills necessary to utilize the resources available in all three systems to the highest extent possible through partnership relations. Being exposed to intentionally designed activities and course components, teachers reconstruct their understandings and roles with regard to partnership relationships.

*Organization of Data Sets*

The idea of using this three-pronged framework to analyze my data developed as I examined my data sets closely and thought more about the history of the course and the content building processes. The ongoing preliminary data analysis also helped me shape this framework that will aid me in looking at lived experiences of teachers in terms of developmental stages.

After the course ended and students' grades were submitted, I printed all of the accumulated course artifacts (project reports, forum postings, vignette responses, family journal, and e-mails) and received the course evaluations from the instructors and compiled all these in to one data set (Data Set I). Considering the volume of data accumulated from course artifacts, I also had to create smaller data categories under this large data set to make the data more manageable for analysis. The seven data categories that were created under the Data Set I which consisted of course artifacts are described in

Table.. in Appendix. All responses to the readings that were posted in the forum were compiled to create Category I.1 under the course artifacts data set. Teacher responses to all 14 vignettes were compiled to create Category I.2; all teacher responses to questions posted for each week for the family project journal created Category I.3; fifty one “Family Story” papers written by each teacher created Category I.4; fifty one “Family-School Partnership” papers written by each teacher created Category I.5; fifty one “School-Community Partnership” papers created Category I.6; and finally fifty one “Final Family Project Reflection” papers were compiled to create Category 1.7.

Table 1: Data organization

| Data Set     | Source of the Data Set | Assigned Readings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Data Set 1.1 | Readings               | <p>Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13<br/>Turnbull, A.P. &amp; Turnbull, H.R.,<br/>Erwin, E. &amp; Soodak, L. (2006)<br/><u>Families, professionals and<br/>exceptionality: Positive outcomes<br/>through partnerships and trust 5<sup>th</sup> ed.).</u><br/>Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson<br/>Merrill Prentice Hall.</p> <p>Chapters 1, 2,6, and 7 of Milstein,<br/>M.M. &amp; Henry, D. A. (2000) <i>Spreading<br/>resiliency: making it happen for<br/>schools and communities</i>. Thousand<br/>Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.</p> <p>Reading: Hehir, T. (2002) Eliminating<br/>ableism in education. <i>Harvard<br/>Educational Review</i>, 72. 1-32.</p> <p>Whitehouse, M. &amp; Colvin, C. (2001)</p> |

|              |                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|              |                                 | <p>Reading families: Deficit discourse and family literacy: <u>Theory into Practice</u>, 40, 3. 212-219.</p> <p>Butera, G. (2005) Collaboration in the context of Appalachia: The case of Cassie. <i>The Journal of Special Education</i>, 39. 106-116.</p> <p>Koepke, M. (Sept., 1992).Back Home in Indiana. Teacher Magazine, vol.4</p>                                                                       |
| Data Set 1.2 | Vignettes                       | <p>It Can Happen to You!</p> <p>Nice families</p> <p>Lynn, Jerry, Derrick &amp; Jessica</p> <p>Just Selfish Enough</p> <p>Sam and his unrealistic expectations</p> <p>Sandra speaks about Leah's school</p> <p>Toots in the Valley</p> <p>Sandra and Janet</p> <p>TJ gets his label</p> <p>Lynn talks about money</p> <p>Meeting Toots</p> <p>Blakes Run</p> <p>Toots and Monica</p> <p>Ryan and the Titans</p> |
| Data Set 1.3 | Family Project Journal          | Teacher responses to questions posted by instructors.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Data Set 1.4 | Family Story Paper              | See assignment description in Appendix...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Data Set 1.5 | Family-School Partnership Paper | See assignment description in Appendix...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |



|              |                                       |                                           |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Data Set 1.6 | School-Community Partnership Paper    | See assignment description in Appendix... |
| Data Set 1.7 | Final Family Project Reflection Paper | See assignment description in Appendix... |

Then, I compiled my notes to create my second data set (Data Set II). Finally, all the taped interviews conducted with key participants were transcribed and compiled to create the third data set (Data Set III). Due to the volume of the data accumulated as course artifacts and due to the fact that I wanted to compare my findings from each of these data sets with each other, I decided to keep these three data sets separate. This provided me with an opportunity to actually compare and contrast my interpretation of the course data with key participants' perception of teacher development in this course and my observations, which in a way was a triangulation method to maintain the reliability of my overall findings.

Based on the framework described in the "Developing an Analytical Framework" section, I reviewed each data set with a process of "focused coding." This method described by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) as a "line-by-line analysis on the basis of topics that have been identified as of particular interest" (p.143). In my case I looked for statements that indicated how these teachers went through the three developmental stages I identified. After I finished the first focused coding of my data for each set, I looked for themes that emerged. I wrote my descriptions of each theme followed by my interpretations of the themes and thoughts about the process. The same process was carried out by a peer debriefer. The peer debriefer was trained in how to do the coding and write a summary paragraph of emergent themes. Coded data and written

interpretations were discussed with the debriefer on a weekly basis until an agreement was reached. In the second close reading of my data, keeping the themes that emerged and my interpretations in mind, I looked for the possibility of new emergent themes and of collapsing themes into broader categories as a process of condensing my data. The same process of writing descriptions of newly emerging themes or categories that accompanied with my interpretations was applied. The procedure for the analysis of Data Set I (course artifacts) was applied somehow differently than the other two data sets in that I analyzed each seven sub categories of Data Set-I separately using the same procedures (focused coding described, describing themes, rereading for emergent themes and data categories, re-description of themes and categories) earlier and then merging the findings of all seven categories to create the findings of the overall data set (Data Set I). Analyzing Data Set-I in seven categories, each of which represented one component of the course, also enabled me to explore the extent of which we were be able to meet the objectives of each course component and activity, whereas the comparison of findings from the three large data sets (my interpretations of course artifacts, my observations, and participant perceptions) provided me with clues for whether this model in general was really working in the development of competitive teachers that could and would foster family-professional partnerships. In the case of my interview data with family members and teachers (Data Set III), themes were coded considering the fact that this data was based on family members and teachers' perceptions.

The results from each three discrete data sets (course artifacts, field notes, and interview data) were presented in separate chapters in the results section. Further, a comparison between the analyses of three data sets (descriptions of themes and written

interpretations of each data set) was conducted to validate interpretations and conclusions and presented as a separate chapter in the results section. This chapter encompassed comparisons of all three data sets and the examination of consistencies and inconsistencies among the findings from each data set. Finally, a concluding chapter highlighting the implications of the findings from all three data sets and the comparison chapter formed the last chapter of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Content Building of the Curriculum

#### *A Historical Examination of Family Involvement Curriculum at Indiana University and the Development of K548*

During the interviews that were conducted by a group of researchers in 2004, Dr. Klein, the originator of the course informed us that the course started as a workshop in 1980. Dr. Klein explained the rationale for such an initiative:

... the legislation that had been passed in 1975 put parents in a very different role than they had been prior. I had been working with some families working through the early intervention program at the institute called Project Prepare and that was 1975-1978. Through that I had heard some incredible stories from parents about what was happening with them and their kids. So coming from those five years a group of us having talked with parents said there are stories here that professionals need to hear and understand and we don't think they're hearing them. (Dr. Klein, March 2004 face-to-face interview)

The course originally started to provide information on how to work with students with disabilities and their families for any one who was working with this population. At that time, many students with disabilities were being served by private institutions, not by public schools. Most public schools did not have special education services. Professionals who worked at such private institutions as centers for people with developmental disabilities came to these workshops. Over the next ten summers, the Workshops continued to be offered. At this point, some of the course content on family-professional relationships and some on strategies for teaching students with special needs.

In 1990, based on funding from a federal grant, a course on families (K548) was designed to include the key components of a new licensure program in Early Childhood Special Education at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). In designing the course, input was solicited from university faculty, service providers, and family members.

The course was first offered in an experimental phase before it was officially approved by the university. The enrollment was very high (120 teachers) because students' tuitions were funded by the federal grant. With the need for such a course strongly supported by legislation and the reiteration of the need to work with families by research in the field, faculty convinced the university to officially approve the course in 1991. The course began to be offered every fall on a regular basis. All students working on special education teaching license had to have the Families course. The originators of the course then wanted to take the course one step further by making it a required course for all special education majors.

Since 1991 the course had been offered as a post bachelor's course. In most cases, people who were getting their master's degree or special education teaching license took this course. In 1990's, with the inclusion movement, the course became an attraction to majors other than special education. People who had no background in special education wanted to get special education teaching license. During the first 4 years, the course was funded by a grant from the federal government. Dr. Klein explains how having that extra money helped establish the content and the way they taught the course,

I started co-teaching with a parent. I got a grant from the government to be able to hire a parent to be able to co-teach the course. So for the 4 years that there was funding I had a parent co-teaching the course with me. The grant also gave me money to pay families to host a practicum student for the semester. So for the four years here the course looked something like: co-taught with a parent, there was a required practicum where people had to be with a family for 1-2 hours a

week and families were paid for their time, and the third component was that the student had to interview a parent that they knew, transcribe it, and qualitatively analyze it. (Dr. Klein, interview)

In the fall of 2003, the course started to be offered as a doctoral seminar. Prior to this change, the course was elective for the doctoral students but required for the special education teaching license. This change stemmed from the fact that a literature base on families was starting to emerge and family systems were seen more commonly as something to study.

The original curriculum was kept very similar over the years. However, minor adjustments were made to meet the needs of professionals and families as well as the changes that occurred in the field. A component of the content focused on the history of parent legislation related to education and the philosophy of acknowledging family voice. The course coordinated to offer a setting where professionals and families could learn and grow together. The point of the Families Course has been on building constructive relationships based on not only preparing professionals for working with families effectively but also helping them understand the issues that families face. The originator of the course Dr. Klein, considers the most important things to teach teachers about families include: “How to listen, how to share bad news, how to convey that you really care, how to engage parents to participate and build relationships, how to share ideas, how to interview, and grow with parents.”

Different resources have been utilized in the K548 course over the years. Various families’ issues taught through textbooks around family issues, articles, vignettes of real family stories, professional’s work in the field, magazines, films, and audio materials have been used to the highest extent possible. Actual interaction with families through a

Family Practicum has been the most important component of the course since the initial years.

*The Families Course in Fall 2003 and Overview of the 2003 Study*

The overall purpose of the Family Course was to enhance the knowledge and skills needed to provide services to individuals with disabilities within family and community contexts. Since 1991, the course has been available on campus once annually. Typically it has a full enrollment of 25-30 special education graduate students. Course activities include vignettes, a Family Project, and online topical cross-section chats. With recent efforts to expand the delivery of graduate coursework to sites distant from IU's Bloomington campus, in the fall of 2003 the course was offered via distance education, through the federally funded Collaborative Teacher Education Program (CTEP), at four campuses; IUB (two sections on the Bloomington campus: Bloomington and Spencer), IU East (Richmond), IU Kokomo, and IUPUI Indianapolis. The course used a distance education format that included a web-based design that used two-way interactive video conferencing. In the video- conferencing sessions, students and instructors met in much the same way as conventional classes; however, the instructors and students were typically in different locations and were connected through live video and audio connections. Web-based CTEP activities were conducted using specifically designed Internet web pages specifically designed for the course activities at IU. Therefore, the course provided a platform to support professional reflection and opportunity to interact and exchange information with a range of colleagues who work at different sites in communities with distinctive cultures. Enrolled students had an opportunity to field test what they learn through the Family Project. The family Project is a practicum for which

students were required to spend time once a week with a family that has a member with a disability.

In the fall of 2003, all five sections of the course in the preliminary study used a standard curriculum that provided students with an overview of methods, resources, and introduction to issues related to the role of community and families within schools and in special education. Instructors met weekly to discuss each week's topic and share ideas about possible activities. However, the instructors of each section of the course had the autonomy to determine activities and resources to be used in their section. They were encouraged to select activities based on the characteristics of the students in their section as well as their own teaching preferences. Different learning and teaching styles contributed greatly to diversity across the sections.

Course activities included vignettes of school and family situations, Family Project, and online topical cross-section chats. The vignettes included a series of stories, told most often in the voice of the parent of a child with disabilities. They spoke about their family experience as it relates to the education of a family member with a disability. These stories were coupled with discussion questions that aimed at helping each teacher deepen their understanding of the family's point of view and the effects of the community and culture on family functioning and experiences. The discussion questions were intended to guide students to consider their own experiences, beliefs, and perspectives about family, school, and community. Vignettes and the accompanying questions were delivered online; students responded in writing to their instructor and subsequently, student responses became the foundation of in-class discussions.



The Family Project was designed to expand teachers' experience with, and understanding of family perspectives on the situation of their children with disabilities within the context of school and society. Each teacher was required to become acquainted with a family that included a member with a disability. Teachers were to visit the family at least four times throughout the semester, scheduling time to listen to the family's stories and in return offer to provide the family with some minor assistance ( e.g., babysitting, tutoring, help with homework). Teachers were asked to use the project as an opportunity to understand family circumstances and their perspectives about strengths, needs, and preferences for personalized and relevant family support. Teachers were required to keep records of their visits in a journal. The project culminated in a midterm paper that summarized what the students had learned about their particular family. They were to describe their own perspective about family's circumstances. A final requirement for teachers was to apply Systems Theory principles of practice to their families' stories. Teachers were to discuss these principles with their project family and understand how the family felt the principles would assist families in achieving their goals for their child with special needs. Teachers were also to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the school and community services their project family received.

Electronic chats offered teachers the opportunity to participate in discussions with other teachers from the other course sections. The chats were an hour long and teachers were to self-select one of seven topics related to the course such as parent advocacy, issues in rural communities, or parent participation in assessment activities. An instructor facilitated the chat by providing discussion prompts and guiding the discussion.

### *Description of the Preliminary Study*

In the 2003 study, we examined special education personnel preparation as it relates to family-professional partnerships at our university. In specific we sought to understand the perspectives of key stakeholders participating in a course entitled Families in Schools and Society (K548).

In our preliminary study, course activities provided us with an opportunity to examine how key stakeholders in special education personnel preparation thought about family-professional partnerships. We wanted to understand how the perspectives of each stakeholder differed or was similar to the others. We sought to examine the contribution of personal and professional experiences to perspectives about family-professional partnerships especially for the special educators (students) in our study. Our overall aim was to gather data that might help us begin to frame a developmental process for novice special educators to guide the design of personnel preparation in the future. We were especially interested in how the socio-cultural background of participants might influence their views.

Of eighty-nine students enrolled in the course, sixteen volunteered to participate in our study. All eight course instructors agreed to participate. Twenty-nine family members participating in the family projects provided us with survey data. Four family members also participated in interviews and/or focus group discussions.

We collected three data types: artifacts, interviews and observations. Artifacts included student journals, vignette responses, midterm and final papers and transcripts of electronic chats. We also conducted semi-structured interviews of students four times at two month intervals; two of the interviews were conducted after the course ended. Three

of the interviews were via telephone. One was face to face in the student's home or workplace. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour and a half and sought to examine the perspective of the students about professional-family partnerships and how their personal and professional experiences contributed to their beliefs.

Course instructors participated in 30-60 minute face-to-face semi structured interviews. The purpose of the interviews in this case was to gather their impressions about the course activities. In addition, we asked instructors to reflect about how their own personal and professional experiences in and with families influenced their perspectives about professional-family partnerships. These interviews were audio-taped and transcribed in their entirety. In addition, we asked course instructors to keep weekly logs of course activities. We observed each class section twice over the semester, collecting running field notes on the spot about course activities and expanding them shortly afterwards. Finally, we examined the course evaluations of each section in order to understand how various aspects of the course may have influenced outcomes.

Family members participating in our study completed a survey about their participation in the family project. Six of them also agreed to participate in telephone interviews and/or focus groups that sought to gather more in depth data about family experiences with the family project as well as their experiences with professional-family partnerships in general. Telephone interviews were accompanied by running field notes composed on the spot and expanded immediately afterwards. The focus group was videotaped and transcribed in its entirety.

Our research team was comprised of experienced special educators. Two faculty members leading the team and four of the doctoral student researchers had over five years

of teaching experience in elementary and secondary special education. As special educators in higher education (or seeking to be), our own lives demonstrated the value we placed in higher education and formal preparation as a means of learning our profession. In addition to likely biases typical of our gender, age and middle-class origins, we were committed to the importance of family-friendly practice in special education (Butera, 1998; Butera et al., 1999; Tertell, Klein & Jewett, 1998). We also believed in the importance of culturally competent practice and we believed that examining one's practice was essential to effective teaching. We began our study with the expectation that the participants in our study brought a variety of professional and personal experiences to their work that were quite likely to inform how they understood family-professional partnerships and how they interacted with one another and course activities.

As data collection came to an end, we analyzed the survey and evaluation data by calculating descriptive data (frequencies, means and standard deviations) at the item level. Overall, this data demonstrated that all three groups of study participants viewed the course activities positively and reported learning from them. They also made a variety of specific suggestions about how to improve the course in specific and personnel preparation of special educators in general.

### *Lessons Learned From Our Preliminary Study*

#### *Personal background of the teachers*

Across data sets and types, personal stories about the families of study participants played an important role in framing how individuals understood families and family-professional partnerships in general. Personal experience had a major impact on

their work with families. Teachers need to understand families as systems, be able to understand the impact of their own family system on their personal and professional development, and be able to apply this information to their relations with their students' families with whom they work. Teachers should develop the awareness that families are complex systems, are different, cannot be generalized, and must be appreciated for the unique unit they are.

### *Understanding diversity*

Study participants brought a variety of perspectives to the ways they understood or thought about diversity. Students often acknowledged that their upbringing in small rural Indiana communities had ill-prepared them for dealing with students and families who differed from them in race, class or culture. They sometimes made assumptions about families based on their socio cultural background. There was also evidence that the students in our study made assumptions about individuals with disabilities and the impact of disabilities on families. In discussing their likely response to having a child with a disability in vignette response, students referred to it as an overwhelming and frightening event. Teachers very frequently talked about their discomfort while around families different from their own. Disability, cultural and socioeconomic background differences were the most important factors that made the interactions harder for them.

### *Time issues and lack of opportunities for personal and individualized contact*

The course was based on the philosophy that teachers must remain, honorably compelled to enhance social justice, educational equality, and human dignity within educational settings (Gay, G. & Kirkland, K., 2003). In order to achieve this, the instructors believed that throughout their professional development teachers must be

exposed to characteristics and experiences of families that are different from their own backgrounds. The increased cultural diversity in schools and communities makes cultural competence of special educators indispensable (Ludlow, 2003). Finally, instructors concurred that professionals should be prepared to transition beyond having a limited awareness to a more elaborated understanding of their own culture as well as the cultures of children and families with whom they work.

The national literature on families has established some problematic trends. First, with mounting demands on teachers to manage paperwork; meet federal, state, and local requirements; meet their students' individual academic and social needs; attend official duties at schools such as meetings and school event organization, teachers increasingly find less time to individually pay attention to specific out of school issues or collaborate with involved parties to expand the education to relevant situations that arise outside the school (Polloway, Patton, & Serna, 2005, p.161). These authors speculate that teachers create a "one type fits all" parental involvement strategies that, in most cases, expect families to comply with school practice and expectations rather than encouraging them to establish unique partnering relationships that accommodate family circumstances and culture.

*Lack of real understanding of family-professional partnership*

The results of our 2003 preliminary study made it clear that there was a mismatch between families' understanding of family-professional partnerships and that of professionals. Even though teachers and families in our study described the same professional behaviors that they believe to facilitate partnership, they attached different meanings to these behaviors based on their expectations from each other and their

understanding of partnership. The behaviors described were “communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust, and respect” which are similar to what has been described in earlier research by [Blue-Banning, M.](#), [Summers, J. A.](#), Frankland, H. C., Lord-Nelson, L., and Beegle, G. (2004). However, it was also clear that both parties could expect different actions from each other in terms of these behaviors/qualities they describe. Regardless the acknowledgement of how difficult each other’s positions are, they also were quick to blame each other for not doing their job but expecting the other party to exhibit more educationally constructive behaviors.

Based on our findings, the course instructors/researchers concluded that teachers should be trained in how to communicate effectively, negotiate understandings and overcome the tendency to blame, resolve power issues, and rework expectations with families. We were convinced that openness, willingness, trust, and a positive attitude were definitely needed to establish and maintain partnerships. For these to be fostered, we concluded that teachers should be prepared to reflect on and refine their practices and actions.

*Family and teacher perspectives: what personal qualities teachers should have, what they ought to know, and how they need to be prepared?*

In the 2003 preliminary study, results indicated that perspectives were accumulated around three areas: personal qualities, skills, and knowledge. Families and teachers described the some common personal qualities that are extensively mentioned in the literature. Our participants described the personal qualities that teachers need to have as openness, willingness to understand and work with others, being hardworking,

commitment, trustworthiness, respect for others, hospitable, having positive attitudes, and being tolerant. The skills and dispositions described by teachers and families seemed to support the personal qualities for putting family-professional partnership into practice: effective communication and listening skills, time management skills, planning and multi-tasking skills, skills related to find and utilize resources. Finally, both families and professionals stated the need for a solid base of knowledge in terms of curriculum (what to teach and how to teach), knowledge of special education and related legislations, and knowledge of each involved party's rights. These findings provided us with the framework for reconstructing the course at hand addressing the needs and expectation of teachers and families from teacher preparation.

#### *Adjustments to K548 Based On Findings From Our Preliminary Study*

Our findings from the 2003 study helped us begin to frame a developmental process for novice special educators guiding the design of the renovated version of the Families course. Three developmental stages were evident in the discussions during our planning meetings for the restructuring. We should start with helping teachers understand “self” in the context of their families, the impact of their upbringing on their personality and on their views, and in the context of their professional roles. We believed that this realization of “self” would help teachers think about the reasons behind their actions, reflect on their actions, and refine their practices in order to work with their students and their families effectively. Through this process teachers also would gain the skills and dispositions that would enable them to understand others. Analyzing our 2003 preliminary study data provided us with clear idea of what was working and what needed to be improved in our program to prepare teachers in partnering with families. One of the



unique qualities of our study and the actions we took to revise our course was that we already had a well established program at hand for over two decades and now we had the perspectives of all stakeholders (i.e., Instructors, teachers, families) about what we ought to do, how we needed to do it, and what we needed to change in order to make this program best meet enrolled teachers' needs.

The fall 2005 course that was the focus of my study included three key innovations. First, family members of students with disabilities were employed as co-instructors with faculty members. Second, the course was offered using two-way synchronous interactive video teleconferencing in three sites across the state (as it was done in 2003), however, the number of face to face meetings in 2005 was raised to four instead of two in order to increase interactions among peers and with families and exchange information. Third, based on our findings from the 2003 study, course content, activities, readings, and projects were aligned and organized in a more structured way. Activities were accompanied by a set of questions that allowed teachers to incorporate their readings and experiences in the discussions and prompted them to think about specific targeted content, skills, and dispositions. Specifically, the following changes to the course content and delivery methods were made:

### *Changes Made to the Content*

#### *Organization of the content.*

We organized the course content based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. This theory looks at a child's development within the context of the system of relationships that form his/her environment and defines complex layers of environment,

each having an effect on the child's development. Bronfenbrenner describes the structure of the environment in four layers: the first layer in the center of all other greater systems that receives input (affected by the outer systems) and affecting the surrounding systems in return with its output (behaviors) encompasses the individual (each individual consisted of 3 subsystems: emotional, biological, and cognitive systems) and names this "microsystem". The next layer is consists of three larger subsystems; family, school, and religion and is called mesosystem. The third layer is called exosystem and has again three subsystems; community, society, and culture. And last, all these sublayers are placed in the global system that is called macrosystem.

With the goal of training teachers that will be able to prepare students to be successful in a global society, we thought it is most appropriate to combine the Family Systems Theory described by Turnbull et al. (1984) which is a smaller model that focuses on the family as a system and its subsystems with the Ecological Systems Theory to move our focus one step forward to a broader context including exosystem layer with community, culture, and society in it. Therefore the course content accumulated around three distinct but at the same time interrelated areas (families, school, and society) and then course activities designed and arranged in a way to help each teacher take the journey from the inner to the outer layers with the realization of the impact of each layer and its subsystems on the individual. This approach helped teachers to start looking at themselves in a broader context and understand their role as professionals in relation to how they grew up, how they were trained, and in relation to their interactions with the population they work with, but also considering how these contexts affect the population they work with.

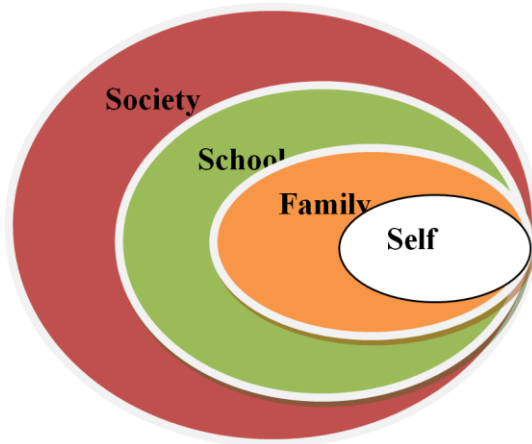


Figure 1: Teacher Development in the Systems Context

During the first 1/3 of the class we started with each individual teacher and family members involved telling their personal stories and analyzing the impact of all these personal experiences, the interactions among subsystems of their families on who they are now and how

they view the world. The second segment of the course was designed around the school as a system and the family-school relationships. Finally, the last segment of the course content designed around how the society functions as a system, its relations with the previously addressed subsystems, the importance of learning about these relationships for becoming effective educators and utilizing the resources available in this broader context to the highest extent possible. The activities in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> segments also designed in a way to provide opportunities for teachers to apply the knowledge and skills they gained throughout the course.

#### *Selection of the readings.*

At this point we decided to keep the text we have used in 2003 but use the newer edition (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak, 2006 5<sup>th</sup> edition). We also decided to keep the vignettes available but also add new ones to facilitate more discussion about diversity of family backgrounds and its impact on their interactions with schools (See Appendix

C). There was a large selection of articles in addition to the text readings (see Table 1: Organization of data). The articles were selected carefully so that they would be relevant to teachers' experiences and address the targeted skills effectively creating a forum for discussion of those issues. The readings were also meaningful for the instructors and their experiences to which they could relate.

*Design of the activities.*

First of all, a general adjustment that was made to all activities was aligning the timing of vignettes, readings, and topics addressed with family project. A set of questions for each week and each component (vignettes, readings, and the family project) were prepared to accompany each activity making sure each intended topic/skill /disposition was addressed in its entirety and each activity reinforced the same message from different aspects enabling them to reach the goal of each activity with the support of instructors. This also has brought structure to the activities but especially to the Family Project. In the 2003 study families and teachers expressed the need to bring some more structure to the Family Project so they would know what they are expected to do and how they should spend their time with their project families in a productive manner.

*Discussion of the readings in online forums.*

Weekly activities were designed to elicit information about teachers' understanding of the readings required for each week and their ability to apply the knowledge gained to real life issues. These activities also gave the teachers the opportunity to hear what other teachers in all sections think, to ask questions as they felt

the need, to exchange information with others, and to negotiate new meanings from what they have read and observed in the field. Discussion forums (sometimes for individual small groups and sometimes for the whole group) were opened on Oncourse, a specifically designed web system at IU to deliver online courses and manage online components of courses. A set of questions to guide the responses and draw attention to the main points targeted was posted for each week. The students were required to do their initial postings by a certain day and time (Wednesday midnight) and to do all other correspondence (questions to classmates, answering those questions) by each Sunday midnight so that all students may have the chance to read all postings and respond to the discussions of their interest. Therefore, use of time and making postings were more structured with this new arrangement. These forums were also a good place to link theory and practice as they provided the chance for teachers to share their understanding of the readings (theory) and share how this understanding applies to their daily practices in their real classrooms and interactions with families. Having students from three different sections from all over the state and working in distinctly different communities would also enhance the discussions adding to the variety of ways in dealing with similar issues under different circumstances. Hearing from others about different practices we believe would help teachers think out of the box and enhance their repertoire of strategies that could improve their practices.

#### *Family Project.*

The Family Project was one of the major projects for this class. With this project the professionals were presented with an opportunity to become familiar with the situation and difficulties surrounding a family that include a member with a disability.

They were informed that their interactions with the family were important for their successful completion of the course requirements. The purpose of this project was to help professionals acquire experience and perspective on the delivery of services within the context of families that include members with disabilities (see the detailed description and the requirements of the project in Appendix D).

In our preliminary study both teachers and families did comment about the need for having more structure to the project and making the goals to be accomplished by each visit clearer. The teachers did feel uncomfortable not knowing how to approach families and how to communicate with them without offending them to accomplish their project. As we wanted teachers to practice effective communication and listening skills safely, we decided to cover these skills in class discussions and model their application in the classroom. By having the family member co-instructors in class students also would have the chance to practice these skills in class before they go out to meet their project families. Then each week teachers were to be provided with a set of questions on which they were to comment in order to guide each weeks discussion and observations with the family. Also before we put each activity into practice, during our weekly meetings with the instructors and family members we made sure to discuss the goals of each activity and the targeted skills, knowledge, and attitudes to be addressed, ensuring that all instructors are aware of the goals to be accomplished and the essence of each activity. In the planning meetings, all course instructors (university instructors and family member co-instructors) agreed to provide extensive feedback to teachers to accomplish the goals of each activity. In some cases if some teachers did not get the intended effect of an activity, the instructor and the family member co-instructors had to redirect the student to

reflect and rethink about the issues we wanted them to think about, asking questions and giving feedback 2-3 times.

During the planning meetings before the course was started the family selection was a discussion topic among instructors and me as the researcher. Referring to the finding of the 2003 study, we knew that teachers tended to pick families that are not as diverse in terms of cultural, socioeconomic, racial, language backgrounds, or the type and severity of disability of their family member. We discussed if we should have a specific criteria for families to be selected. Some of us proposed that all the families to be host families for the project should have a member with severe disability which we thought greatly affect the family's relationships with professionals and their own family system as a whole, and consequently their experiences. However, later in the discussion some of the instructors pointed to the fact that some of these teachers had no experience working with families as professionals at all. Therefore, it would be very difficult for them to initiate and establish a relationship with a family that has unique and intense circumstances. Finally it was decided that the decision would be left to the teachers with regard to the qualities they select for their project family. Teachers were to be asked to find a family that will feel comfortable with them and with whom they also feel some degree of comfort. At the same time teachers were to be encouraged to expand their horizons by getting out of their comfort zone and selecting a family that is different than their own whom has a member that has the greatest degree of disability with which they are comfortable. If the teachers had their own classrooms they could select a family of their students for their project. This was another discussion topic in our planning meetings. Some said that since our goal is to help these professionals establish partnerships with

their own students' families why not start with this project and require them to do the project with one of their students' families. Then remembering the concerns teachers expressed in the 2003 study that they did not want to be unfair to other students by becoming acquainted more intensely with one family, we decided to again leave it to them to decide about whom they select but also providing them with some connections if they did not have a family with whom they could do their project. The teachers needed to acquire the family's consent for participation for the project by explaining the project and the course requirements to the families.

*Family project journals and family responses.*

Teachers were required to spend at least a two-hour time with their project family each week for 15 weeks and journal about their experiences. This was a huge increase in terms of time required to be spent with families. Our findings from the 2003 study indicated that difficulty in overcoming their judgmental and blaming attitude remained to be a problem for many teachers. Therefore, by intensifying the experiences with families, providing them with more time to share the lives of these families we aimed the experience to heighten their understanding of and empathy towards families. In our planning meetings we decided to have the students turn these journals into individual private drop boxes that could be seen only by the teacher, the instructor, and the co-instructor family members in order to protect the privacy of the project families.

*Vignette responses.*



Jenlink and Kinnucan-Welsch (2001) suggest that simply asking teachers to reflect on real stories that are similar to what they encounter in their practices can provide a natural bridge to a serious inquiry about the deepest layers of value and belief that under gird the decisions they make. They state that involving teachers in dialogue provides teachers with the tools to improve their practices because dialogue contributes to collective inquiry and learning that sustains the community.

Based on this assumption, vignette responses in this course were seen as the needed forum for teachers to discuss how they would deal with certain issues, discuss their view of families, and reflect on their role as professionals. The vignette responses also were required to be turned in individual drop boxes where only instructors could view them again to protect the privacy of personal experiences shared by teachers. Based on the predetermined goals of each vignette activity, a set of guiding questions also were to be posted for each vignette to guide the responses of teachers (see Appendix C) but also teachers were expected to extend their discussions by providing examples from their real life experiences. Instructors provided feedback as needed by commenting or asking questions to make sure that teacher got the main ideas to be pondered and met the objectives of each activity.

#### *Face-to-face discussions.*

Again based on the findings from the 2003 study, it became clear that the two-way videoconferencing could be time consuming and inefficient in conducting the course meetings. However, using two-way video conferencing was important in that it enabled teachers from all over the state to see each other and visualize with whom they are talking

in their online interactions. As moderation to the problem mentioned, we decided for instructors and family member co-instructors to be present at each site and at the same time keep the video-conferencing for a period of time during each face-to-face meeting. This would provide the chance for everyone in all sections to get acquainted but also provides the flexibility for each section to break from the videoconferencing and carrying out their agenda at their site with their instructors. The number of face-to-face meetings were increased from two to four in order to provide more contact since the focal point of the curriculum was building relationships.

*Term papers.*

Two term papers were included in the curriculum (see assignment descriptions Appendix D). The first was to be a compilation of community resources in which they live or work and the second paper was to be a synthesis of their weekly family journals they were to keep throughout the semester. For the first paper, they were to research the resources in a community they choose (this could be the community they live in, the community they work in, or the community in which their project family lives) and prepare a resource guide for families and professionals. For the second term paper, they were to try to make sense of the ongoing family journals in a broader context and how they could use what they learn from their observations, interactions with their project families in their practice with other families. For this paper, a set of questions to prompt teachers to think about specific issues was to accompany the assignment. This paper was in a sense the synthesis of everything they learn in class, through the family project, and through their self reflection.

## *Changes Made to Delivery Methods*

### *Unity in all sections.*

In the earlier version of the course each instructor had the flexibility in what they want teach and how they want to deliver it. This infraction seemed to have created obstacles in communication among sections during face-to-face meetings and online chats because not all sections were necessarily on the same page. In this revised version we decided to unify all three sections in terms of content, timing, and delivery methods using a common syllabus.

### *Parent co-instructors.*

Knowing how important has been to hear the stories of real families and to have them present in discussions related to family issues, we decided to find family members who would be willing to participate in the course as co-instructors. At the same time, not having any official financial support to put this plan in action, we have stated the fact that we will not be able to offer a substantial amount of compensation for their help while recruiting family members for these positions.

Since the course has been offered at IU for a long time and the instructors have been actively recruiting families for becoming guest speakers in class sessions and for participating in the family project as host families for many years, a pool of family members who have been constantly participating in the course has already been established. Due to this long history of involvement in the course and the relationships of family members with the instructors, it was decided that each instructor would determine family members who would be appropriate for these positions and contact them asking for their participation. The qualities that these family members should have was another

discussion topic in these planning meetings. First of all, it was decided that these family members should be the ones who have unique experiences in terms of their child's disability and their experiences with professionals. Second, these family members should be articulate and willing to share their stories and their experiences. Moreover, they should possess the skills that they are expecting professionals to have for establishing and maintaining partnerships. For example, we are training our professionals to be able to communicate effectively by being open, nonjudgmental, reflective, trustworthy, committed, and skillful in speaking and listening. Therefore, it is logical that instructors and co-instructor family members model these skills that they are trying to teach professionals. Co-instructor family members also needed to have the time commitment to be present on online discussions and at different sites when we are holding the 4 face-to-face class meetings. One concern that remained unresolved in this regard was that we would want these family members to be representative of all families in the field. This did not seem to be possible, however, because all these family members were the ones who were articulate and voluntarily involved. In reality, we wanted the voice of families who are not always represented to be heard on this platform. Based on these criteria, each instructor determined few family members and asked them for their participation. Four family members were recruited for these positions; Ellie, Maya, Paula, and Harry. A brief profile of each co-instructor family member was provided in the methods section.

Overall, these changes aimed at making the experience more meaningful for teachers by providing them with more opportunities to learn through hands-on experiences, discussions, and reflection and creating more opportunities to put what they

learn into practice. This approach would in return help teachers overcome the barriers identified in the 2003 preliminary study as obstacles to family-professional partnerships.

## CHAPTER FIVE

"It behoves all man to know thyself and (thereby) to exercise self-control."

Heraclitus

### Examining Teachers' Self Realization Narratives

In this chapter I review how a course using Systems Theory specifically target teachers' understanding of "self" as it relates to their own upbringing. The reasoning behind this focus was threefold: 1) to enable teachers to turn their gaze to their own personality, analyze their perspective, and understand their strengths and weaknesses in the context of their upbringing and social/cultural/economic background; 2) to help teachers use constant reflection as a tool for professional thinking as they try to make sense of, and respond to the world, as they facilitate family-professional partnerships; and 3) to enable teachers to develop an awareness of the implications their personality and upbringing and the impact these may have on their professional practices.

This chapter documents the journey of teachers in utilizing self study skills in order to comprehend their existence in a systems context. Four overarching themes emerged across data sets under the "self realization" category: 1. Middle Class-White-Spiritual; 2. Finding "Self" in Another's Faculty of Knowing and Reasoning; 3. Understanding Their Family in the Systems Context; and 4. Hidden Personalities. In this chapter, I discuss how these four themes document teachers' response to this particular family-centered curriculum.

*Middle Class, White, Spiritual*

Regardless of the persistent call for the need to diversify the teacher force in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, and SES, this study indicates that overwhelmingly teachers still come from white-middle class backgrounds. In addition to this common phenomenon of teachers being white and middle-class, data indicates that the nature of teachers' spiritual backgrounds was limited to this race and social class perspective and this limited exposure to religious diversity influenced their views and practices.

Among the 51 teacher participants (refer to table 3, Appendix G) little diversity was evident in terms of culture, race, religion, or family structure. Only 5 teachers reported having grown up in single homes- and these were mostly due to the death of a parent at early age, only one was African American. Few teachers explicitly stated that they came from hardships due to low SES in their family of origin. The majority of teachers also indicated that they had little to no exposure to people of different backgrounds while they were growing up. The majority of teachers stated that Christianity was the religion that shaped their values, with only two teachers coming from Jewish backgrounds. It seems that limited exposure to cultural diversity left teachers susceptible to perceiving their values as universal and using them as the norm for judging others. The following excerpt from Amy's narrative sums the perspectives of many participants in this study and demonstrates a susceptibility to misjudging families with differing backgrounds:

I was raised in a middle class household in which both of my parents worked and my brothers and I were expected to grow up, graduate from college, and be successful in our adult lives. While these expectations may seem unrealistic or impractical to some, it was something that my family valued and wanted us to attain. During the course of this class I came to the realization that there are many families that hold different beliefs than my own but I should not interpret this dissimilarity as indifference to the education of their children. I suppose that most of my biases stem from the fact that I teach in a school where most of the students

live in poverty. Being poor is not something I criticize but I do tend to be more critical of parents who do not work and choose instead to stay at home and succumb to their living conditions and situation. I suppose that this bothers me because I have always been taught to believe that you are supposed to work and provide for your family. It has also been engrained in my head that if you do not like the conditions in which you are living, then you need to enrich and change your situation. Since taking this class I have come to the understanding that just because the parents that I deal with do not work does not mean they are lazy or are comfortable with their living situation. Coming into this class, I had many biases, but I feel that self-reflection and enlightenment from my instructors has allowed me to look beyond what I feel is apparent and put myself in someone else's shoes in order to gain their life perspective.(Amy, week 16, final reflection)

If such reflections had not taken place as part of the course, it is likely that Amy's attitude would have hindered her ability to relate to families from other cultural backgrounds. The majority of teachers seemed to be so immersed in their white, middle-class, Christian values that they held a uniform view of how families function. Their narratives indicated that the tremendous value placed on middle class appearance, success, respectability, and self-reliance could be attributed to their backgrounds. Even teachers from lower income families embraced and adhered to white, middle-class values regardless of their family of origin's background. It was clear that they valued this life style as superior to other alternatives. In my analysis, I was able to identify different reasons for these outlooks: some, came from small Midwestern towns, so simply did not have the chance to encounter cultural diversity due to the geographic location of their families. Lou's testimony is a good example for this when she states,

"My parents taught me that being prejudice was wrong but growing up in a community where I had no contact with anyone different from me made this a hard concept to understand. This included not seeing anyone with physical disabilities in school. The students that had severe disabilities were always bussed to a neighboring town and I never had exposure." (Lou, week13 family journal)



For others, their insecurity seemed to be from an organized act by their families to shelter them from diversity by sending them to schools that were responsive only to their culture and by deliberately residing in communities of people with similar backgrounds. For some, wanting to be perceived as middle class seemed to be a matter of choice. This was demonstrated in the narratives of teachers who portrayed their families as middle class in the earlier stages of the course but as they became more comfortable talking about the realities, they started sharing more realistic descriptions of their family's situation. This deviation between the way teachers wanted to be seen and reality of their circumstances implies that some teachers may deem life styles that don't adhere to middle class values as less acceptable and less worthy. In a way they try to distance themselves from those realities. This might suggest that some teachers implicitly hold negative attitudes towards family backgrounds that are not white, middle-class. Clearly given these circumstances, accomplishing 100% readiness for, and commitment to open family-professional partnerships can not be expected.

Another striking similarity among teachers was the way they indicated the great influences their spiritual beliefs had on their lives. The following quote from Katherine was typical:

My mom comes from a German-Irish descent and my dad's family is German. I do not feel either of these heritages played a large part in how I was raised. My mom comes from a very strong Roman Catholic background and that was instilled in my brother, sister and myself. I think the church has had and continues to have the strongest influence on the decisions I make and how I live my life. Growing up, I would say we were middle class. My parents grew up in a small southern Indiana town... I think attending CCD (similar to Sunday School), helped me form many of my beliefs about myself, others, and the world that I still hold to this day. My parents are very upstanding and moral people and that was taught to us through modeling and example. (Katherine, Week 13, forum)

As exemplified by Katherine, religion was perceived as having an extensive role in the lives of many participant teachers. Approximately 80% of teachers felt the need to strongly express their ideas about their religion's impact on their personality, views of the world, and professional practices. The following quotes exemplify teachers' perceptions of the extent to which spiritual beliefs played a role in their day to day conduct:

Personally, my husband and I use spiritual support as our main life management skill. We really believe that God is in control of our lives and that everything that happens to us happens for a reason that maybe we do not understand. (Kari, week 13, forum)

I believe that religion probably played the most important part of my family life. My mother's family is staunchly Roman Catholic... Much of our schedule was created around religious rituals (mass each morning, prayer before meals, church-related social events, etc.). Religion continues to affect my family culture... My family of origin used spiritual support as a method of solving problems or finding comfort. Spiritual beliefs were at our central core. We trusted in God that he would provide for us when we couldn't provide for ourselves, and he always did. (Beth, week 13, forum)

My family is a strong Christian family and that is the foundation of our family. All decisions that are made have that at their core. I've followed those beliefs and accepted them as my own as I have grown up. (Shane, week 13, forum)

I see my family culture as the average Midwestern family culture... The most important is our religious culture. This drives many of the other cultures that we value. We tend to have a traditional Christian vision for the roles of the men and women as described in the Bible. (Andrew, week 13, forum)

These quotes not only demonstrate how teachers perceive the impact of religion, but perhaps also that they see Christianity as containing the only value system that endorses positive humanistic relationships. The following quotes from Jeanne and Marjory illustrate how teachers see Christianity as having a superior value system. In her family journal, Jeanne compares her family of origin to her project family: "I think the Shank family is in many ways like my own family. We both value our religious faith and feel that most decisions should be based on our faith in God and advice found in the

Bible.” Marjory describes how her beliefs about individuals with disabilities and the meaning of her professional responsibilities are embedded in her religious values:

Jonah 4:11 informs us of God’s great concern and providence in caring for those that are less fortunate than the typical individual or family. He simply states, “But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people that cannot tell their right hand from their left...” to me, He is referring to a child with a disorder. Since our Lord has shown a concern for the individual with a disability, I have decided to take that stand as a basis for this paper, as well as my view for the future. (Marjory, final reflection)

As she later talked about the changes she would make in her classroom Marjory again cited her reason for doing this all as due to her religious beliefs rather than making changes to her professional practices based on universal humanistic concerns:

However, I suppose the ultimate reason that I would do things differently is the reason I give in the opening of this paper. God has shown His concern and providence for the child with a disability (I guess in a way, poverty is also a disability). So, perhaps it is an unstated mandate for the few that have ears to hear.

The phrase “less fortunate than the typical individual or family” the previous citation of Marjory implies that her religious values lean towards a deficit discourse. She reinvigorates this view by looking at people from her own seemingly elevated Christian perspective. Marjory’s statements imply that having a disability or being poor make people less fortunate. She concludes that it is the responsibility of those “more able” to help those “less fortunate.” Marjory never questions the values of her religion. The way she perceives them as “superior or as the best way to conduct our lives” hinders her ability to see that her attitude may not be conducive to partnerships. Marjory directly puts “the less fortunate” on the receptive side of services, implying that they are needy of help rather than as capable partners who could contribute equally to the educational process. Signs of the deficit discourse of some teachers indicate their belief that their way of life is

superior to others. Such opinions may cause teachers to be less tolerant of others whose culture, belief systems, or ways of life are different than theirs. This assertion was based partially on common practices among some teachers to criticize families who: do not work but live on community resources, are divorced (once or more than once), do not have clearly defined roles for family members, do not make education their first priority, or are loud and open about their private issues.

My analysis indicates that many teachers do not reflect deeply on how their faith and their understanding of faith generally influence their professional practice. The impact of teachers' faith on their conduct was also evident in week 12 online postings. On week 12, the topic that families come in all shapes and sizes was covered. Teachers were prompted to respond to a set of questions, including "How can we make schools more welcoming to non traditional families (foster parents, gay and lesbian parents, adoptive parents)?" Almost half of the teachers (23) who posted in this forum chose not to address this question. All teachers, at various points in their discourse agreed that family involvement is essential and teachers should do everything in their power to increase and facilitate such involvement. It is likely that this avoidance emanated from their discomfort with these controversial issues particularly because such issues challenge their Christian, middle-class values. Did they choose to avoid this question so that they would not be seen as politically incorrect? Trying to answer this question, I compared teachers who did not respond to this question with teachers who declared their religion to be a huge part of their lives/ views/actions. These two sets of teachers were almost identical.

Eight (8) of the remaining(28) teachers did address the question in a generic way by stating that schools should be open to all families and that teachers should be open-minded. Even these few did not mention any strategies to overcome specific issues that prevented non-traditional families from getting involved in schools. Kari's response was typical, implying her disapproval of alternative life styles: "As teachers, we must become more educated about these non-traditional families. Whether we agree with their lifestyles or not, we must show respect because we are working with their children" (Kari, week 12, forum). Only 15 teachers openly talked about their willingness to include non-traditional families by suggesting specific strategies to make schools more welcoming for them.

I think that schools can be a very intimidating place for parents, especially if they did not have positive experiences in school as a child. I can imagine this would be even more intimidating for non-traditional families, such as gay and lesbian parents, because school is traditionally such a conservative environment. People are taught to conform to the rules, those spoken and unspoken... This would also serve as an excellent foundation to introduce students to a variety of family types in the context of social interactions. (Beth, week 12 forum)

The rest (5) either implied how hard this is to overcome at their schools and in their own practice or openly provided their opinion that the matter should not be politicized at school. As Barbara elaborated:

I do not feel that it is necessary for the school to support gay and lesbians any more than they openly support heterosexuals. Sexual orientation really has no place in our schools today. The text suggests posting gay support stickers such as the rainbow, or celebrating gay pride week, but I do not feel that we should support this in school. This is not simply a matter of a national holiday, but of a sexual orientation, and not an orientation that all families condone for their children, so I really do not think that it should be openly advocated in our school systems. That is not to say that we should not be supportive of all types of families in our classrooms, just that we should not worry so much about being politically correct all of the time. (Barbara, week 12 forum)

Among the five teachers who mentioned their discomfort about the issue, Dustin stated that it was a problem of stereotypes, commenting “I feel a lot of the problem that we see in our schools is that we are very stereotypical. A lot of people don’t want to deal with it. That is sad to say but it is the truth.” Kari regarded this as a matter of personality by saying “Before non-traditional families can feel more comfortable in our schools, teachers must be more comfortable with them. I know that I struggle with this a lot.” When it became evident that sexual orientation was a sensitive issue linked to personal values/beliefs of teachers, the instructors did in fact try to convey that this should not be a matter of personal beliefs but rather a matter of professionals providing equally high quality services to all families regardless of their background, life style, or beliefs. At several junctures in the course, instructors reminded participant teachers that this was a matter of teachers modeling acceptance in order to nurture open-mindedness in their students. Instructors also informed teachers that talking about these issues openly and designing our curriculum in a way to address such diversity was good practice and should not be considered as “politicizing the issue.” For instance, responding to Barbara’s comments, the instructor Kara wrote:

While I understand your concerns about politicizing the school experience, I do think it is important for all students to see some similarities between the families they read about, talk about, learn about in school (in their texts, novels, pictures, etc) and their own families. If we are not conscious and deliberate about the materials we select, I fear we may be alienating or ostracizing children of parents that are outside of the portrayal that traditional educational materials include (this is beyond sexual orientation...). Any thoughts? Much of the focus has been on "events" or occasions to increase involvement. I would encourage us all to keep in mind the curriculum we use, the books we select, the stereotypes we may subtly reinforce, and our own biases while teaching. Creating a welcoming culture in the school is more than an "event"...it is the pervasive environment we create in our classrooms, hallways, & school buildings... (Kara, week 12 forum)

Some evidence of bias or discomfort about sexual orientation in the data eventually lead me to question whether teacher educators are fully dealing with all the variables that will enable them to reach the goal of attitudinal change. It is imperative to ensure that teachers have the appropriate dispositions to deal with diversity in their practice. I think the most valuable impact of this course was that it constantly stressed the fact that fixed views about any type of diversity are problematic and helped teachers become aware of the impact their background values have on their perceptions of others through hands-on activities and reflection. They were constantly redirected to the fact that teachers' main focus should be the well being of their students and that they should put their effort in finding ways to contribute to this wellbeing and get away from judgmental attitudes they may have towards the families they are working with. Deliberate reflection proved to have taken place in the discourse of the majority of teachers at many different levels. It was gratifying to see that this type of reflection took place not only when teachers prompted to do so specifically but they seemed to have revisited their assumptions throughout the course as they became more comfortable reflecting. This result denotes that this curriculum has been pretty effective in helping teachers reevaluate their views and understand the circumstances of families better. This also was an added step in understanding that their values are not the norm and that they should overcome their biases, assumptions, and their judgmental attitudes.

### *Finding "Self" in Another's Faculty of Knowing and Reasoning*

As presented earlier in this chapter, developing the ability to recognize who they are and the impact of their identity on their professional practices is critical for teachers. However, as social beings, human experiences find meaning through interacting with

others. As much as teachers need to turn their gaze to study “self,” they also need to see their reflection in their knowing of others. This resembles looking at a mirror to see and correct one’s flaws. The world is not created around one’s own view and values only. One’s ability to navigate in life highly depends on understanding the values of others and finding a neutral point to interact with others without crossing their boundaries. Skillful navigation of relationships is not only about how we understand ourselves, but also about how we understand others and how we are understood by them. In a simple way, the conjunction of these three understandings is the neutral point where we could best discern the reflex of our “true selves.” Therefore, it is of utmost importance that teacher education prepares teachers to understand “self,” others, and pay attention to how they are understood by others so they can overcome their partial views of what is happening in their interactions.

Provided with case studies in which they were to respond to situations in negotiating power and understanding with families, teachers were asked to identify their personal weaknesses, insecurities, misconceptions, biases, and prejudices by putting themselves in the place of the families and think about how it feels to be on the parent side. To accommodate for the diversity in experiences, reflections were not kept strictly about educational experiences. Results with regard to teachers’ ability to identify, understand, and speak about their limitations were encouraging. Comments by many teachers across data sets indicated that such a thought process was achieved by the majority of teachers who have been exposed to this curriculum. In their final reflection activity many teachers stated their realization of how teachers may get stuck in their own



viewpoint and preconceptions and how this may cause them to miss on families' views and the support around them.

I have come to realize that I hold several prejudices I hadn't realized existed before taking this class. One of these has to do with "ableism". I had not even considered this as a point of view, prior to this course, and will attempt to be aware of my own beliefs and prejudices, as I deal with parents of students with disabilities. (Lorid, week 16, final reflection)

Without even knowing it, I was becoming jaded. Detaching myself emotionally from situations, telling myself behaviors were not a reflection on me... seeing circumstances from your own personal viewpoint closes your mind to other perspectives. Since gaining this insight, situations have been so much smoother in my room. The support system and rapport that has been developed is tremendous. I am finally the teacher that I always hoped I would be. Not because of my own personal strength, but the strength given to me by those around me- including the parents. (Samantha, week 16, final reflection)

Their realization that "families have their own good reasons for doing things the way they do" was an important step towards becoming cognizant of families expertise in their children and that in some cases families can see things that professionals may not be able to see in their limited interactions with children in schools . The thought process documented also point to the fact that teachers were be able to achieve a level of understanding of and empathy for how families may feel in their interactions with professionals. The thought process of Kari exemplifies the trend identified in the data that most teachers were able to look at issues from both the professional side and family perspective:

As a parent, I have experienced a professional wanting to be in control of everything when my son was in the hospital... I ended up winning this battle, but I was so offended that they would not listen to my point of view and understand why I did not want to do this. I think they thought I was a bad parent, but I had good reason. I guess this should make me realize that parents have reasons for doing what they do, and I must be open-minded and try to understand their point of view. (Kari, week 11 forum)

Testimonies provide an affirmation of insecurities teachers may have about being in control, the desire to be right and look professional, avoid deficiencies in communicative skills, and recognize and appreciate the efforts of others. Further, these personal testimonies document that by using critical thinking skills and reflection, teachers can realize how certain biased thinking/feeling may be reflected in their professional practice. As mentioned earlier, course activities were deliberately designed to help teachers think from the families' perspective. These were effective in helping teachers reach the ability to overcome personal barriers and transfer this self realization to their understanding of how families of students may feel in similar situations. The following excerpts are just few to exemplify this trend.

There have been instances in my life when “professionals” have criticized me for certain ideas and beliefs that I have held. I think that this is extremely frustrating, especially when you feel in your heart that you are right. When this has happened in the past I have immediately “clammed” up, afraid of making a fool of myself. I am very sensitive to what others say and how they say it so if I feel threatened I will refrain from speaking because I don’t want others to think I am below them intellectually. I am sure that this sounds silly but I don’t like to be made to feel that I am wrong for something that I truly feel... In my personal life I feel that I am a person that needs to be right all of the time. This is something that I battle with because I know that I am this way. When I am at school though, I think I am a little tamer and can take criticism and ideas a little easier... I think I am also good about listening to the parents of the children with whom I work with. Are there times that I listen but still think they are wrong? Absolutely, I think that is only human nature, but I feel that I do give them the benefit and try to work with them to integrate their ideas and mine into one unified plan. (Amy, week 11, forum)

I have the most problem when someone my age tries to “teach” me something that I don’t feel they are qualified on. I feel that I am being patronized in those situations, and I get frustrated. I can see someone in an administrative position feeling annoyed at a parent with no background in special education telling them what to do... Miscommunication happens with me a lot, because I don’t clearly communicate what I need from people (even those closest to me have a hard time with that). (Heather, week 11, forum)

Yes, coming from a mother’s view point teachers at times can lack patience, tolerance and see things only from their view point... They make it seems like it is

the parents fault that their child has a disability and as a general education teacher they just do not have the time to deal with “special children.” (Crystal, week 11, forum)

When the reflective process did not happen to the extent aimed for, the instructors were committed in trying to guide teachers in this process and help them reach the desired result. The instructors and co-instructor family members were very supportive throughout the reflection process and frequently assured teachers that they understood how hard it was to recognize personal limitations and act to overcome them. Gretchen and Kara’s comments convey the empathy and emotional support they provided the teachers with to reinforce their reflective thought processes.

Yep I think you got it exactly right, Lori! It can so easily turn out that it becomes more important to be right than it does to do what’s right for the sake of the children in question. I’ve seen this happen more times than I care to remember. I’m glad you are aware of your propensity to want control! (Gretchen, week 11, forum)

I like your emphasis on including the voice of the parent...and being heard. If we could just remember that when our professional egos get involved! I think if we move away from the idea of “right” we are headed in the right direction...it is quite feasible that both the professional and the parent are “right” with totally different ideas.(Kara, week 11, forum)

Great that you had the experience as the parent and not as the expert at a meeting... so strange how even though you know everyone, it still can be intimidating. Imagine how it feels when you are not a member of the school community. (Gretchen, week 11, forum)

Sometimes when teachers did not get the main idea or did not put the effort into deep reflection, the instructors pushed them further to ensure that reflection was taking place. When Annie responded to a question firmly without deeply reflecting and thinking about similar circumstances in her life by stating, “I have not ever experienced that sort of treatment by a professional,” Kara responded,

Really? Never by a doctor, a lawyer? A professor? A customer service rep at a department store? Some professional that needs to remind you he/she is boss? I

bet if you think about this more broadly, you will find an experience...it is important to try to put ourselves in the shoes of the parent, even if we can't relate to the educational piece. (Kara, vignette 6, week 8)

Later on in the same response to Vignette Six, Annie said, "Since this is my first year of teaching, I have not had this happen for me." Kara urged her toward deeper reflection by providing an example from her own experiences and commenting:

Are you ever the person that is intimidated? I know sometimes when working with the school psych I wasn't sure what they were saying (like with the testing you were talking about) and I have had that powerless feeling this vignette describes...I really want to push you to think about these from many angles (not just strictly educational examples if that doesn't relate to you). Try try try to have some understanding of the experiences these family members/school professionals are having and creating. (Kara, vignette 6, week 8)

The majority of teachers appeared to have secured a better understanding of "self" in relation to their experiences with families and gained the ability to utilize the knowledge and experiences provided in this course in their professional practice. The following excerpts from Elizabeth and Seth demonstrate how they put this knowledge in application as they interacted with families in their practice:

All I knew about this family was what I heard from other teachers at school. I was told that the mom is so aggressive and crazy. When I became Sarah's teacher I had all these preconceived notions about how this family is going to be. And I knew that if I didn't try to know them on a personal basis I would just go along with what people thought. It was like I knew I had the responsibility to myself that I needed to rally for a relationship with them, because when you do that there is so much more to it than what you hear and think...(Elizabeth, phone interview 11.29.2005)

Wanting desperately to meet with the mother I rescheduled and then again it was rescheduled due to financial issues making it difficult to get to the school. In speaking with the student I found out that the mother was going to spend payday money on a cab ride to get to school. So I arranged a car ride with the school social worker and then made the offer to the mother who accepted. To make a long story short the conference was held and the mother was able to purchase new clothes for her daughters. I did not expect the amount of communication I had especially through the student... had I not tried or been accommodating I

probably would never have met the mother or would have made the situation worse by not being flexible and understanding of her needs. (Seth, week 14, reflection)

No matter how hard the instructors tried to walk teachers through the reflection process, stimulate their realizations, and help them transfer that knowledge to their interactions with families, data suggest that not all teachers were able to achieve the same level of effective outcome. Even though they participated in the reflective process, clues in their discourse revealed that some teachers had not achieved the level of transferring the knowledge to their practices. Their inability to apply the knowledge was most commonly seen in how they thought about and interpreted the actions of families of their students. In the following example, Erica was not able to see that the parent might have a good point and a good reason for her suggestions but interpreted the situation as the parent trying to teach her how to do her job:

It is a good trait to have if you are trying to be an advocate for something or someone. This kind of trait does get in my way sometimes. I am a swim coach and it is hard when you have parents try and come to tell you that you are coaching their kid wrong. That is hard for me because I know they have an opinion even though I do not want to hear about it. I usually say thank you for the suggestion and go about my business. Some things are not left up for negotiations. (Erica, week 12 forum)

This attitude does not only cause the teacher to disregard and miss what is being offered to her but it also shuts the communication lines down. Remembering the vision of this curriculum, instead of viewing the case only from her own lens, Erica should have reviewed her own practices to identify any flaws and incorporate parent's suggestions to optimize her instruction. Such opinionated views were evident in the narrative of few teachers and appeared to cause teachers to be inconsiderate of others and prevent them from understanding the actions of others. The following quote exemplifies another

teacher's one-sided view and the way the instructor targeted to help the teacher overcome this limitation:

I think that "nice" families perceive disability as a nuisance and a blemish on their reputation. These perfectionist families feel that they are the model with which we should all strive, so when something comes along to tarnish this reputation, they are embarrassed. It appalled me to think that Andrew's family didn't want Leah's picture to be in the paper for attending Spina Bifida Camp. What kind of family says this about a child? These people are obviously not compassionate and only care about how others perceive them. (Amy, vignette 2, week 4)

The vignette activity indicated that Amy unfeelingly criticized the actions of the family without realizing the similarities between the actions of this family and the actions of her own family. In an earlier posting Amy stated:

One life skill that would never have been utilized by my family would be the professional support. My family is very proud and I know that they would never ask for help from an agency or individual outside of our family. My family is very proud and I think they would feel inferior if they had to count on someone else. (Amy, week 3, Forum)

In response to the criticism of the family in Amy's posting to the vignette, Gretchen reminded Amy of her response to week 3 forum to help her see the similarities between the actions of the vignette family and Amy's own family in light of the Systems Theory. She wanted Amy and other teachers to see that this is a general tendency of middle class families to protect their family image in the society:

HMMM- Amy, didn't you just write in your earlier response that your family did not like to consult professionals as a means of support? That they were proud and independent? In some ways I think the response of Andrew's family is similar if more extreme. Families that have a member with a disability want to do for themselves and they often can't. It can be very disheartening and demoralizing for them. It has always been interesting to me that teachers whose own families would never consult a therapist/support group/counselor will be the first to suggest that the parents of their students do it. Andrew's family did indeed emphasize appearance but, while this story is an extreme example I think it is very common for families NOT to want to have their family's blemishes made public. Gretchen, vignette 2, week 4)

This illustrates how well aligned the curriculum activities were to preventing misconceptions of teachers at all levels and induce teachers' reflection. It should also be noted that the commitment of the instructors played an important role in how they reinforced the skills targeted. Reviewing the narrative of Amy as illustrated above and some other teachers who demonstrated similar tendencies, it seemed that some teachers were quick in judging the actions of others without putting the thought into relating to them.

### *Understanding Their Family of Origin in the Systems Context*

The general assumption of the first part of this course was that teachers should be able to understand their own family dynamics in order to understand Systems Theory and its implications for how teachers understand the dynamics of families with whom they interact. If teachers did not develop an understanding of why families behave the way they do and the reasons behind such behaviors, they are more likely to jump to conclusions based on their frame of reference. As documented earlier in this chapter, teachers tend to have difficulty in realizing that their values and conduct must not be the norm for others. To overcome judgmental and partial understandings, activities designed to help teachers reevaluate the structure of their families of origin and analyze the functioning of these structures were used to help teachers exercise the skills needed to understand families and their relationships with schools.

Based on the approach described above, teachers were presented with case studies and activities in which they were asked to reflect on their family background, understand the variables behind the way their family responded to specific situations and

the impact of these transactions on them as a subsystem in their family. Underlying sub-themes that emerged in the “Understanding Their Families in the Systems Context” included: (1) understanding of the systems approach and its applications to family situations; (2) viewing families as unique systems whose functioning is enhanced with the supports from the larger systems; (3) awareness of the impact events and changes have on family functioning; (4) awareness of the impact their families’ micro-cultures have on family’s functioning; and (5) ability and skills needed to communicate about family matters comfortably.

Since current teachers are so wrapped up with the demands standard based education mandates put on them, many seem to disregard the need to embrace a Systems Theory approach in their practices. Throughout the course, many discussions took place about the time commitment needed to collaborate with families and how hard this would be in their current situation at schools. When teachers were reintroduced to the Systems Theory approach and its rationale, they began to realize the value in utilizing it. The following comments are examples of those who realized its benefits:

I feel that family systems gives a more clear view of the “big picture” as professionals learn to understand and work with families. It does not just take into account one view of how families interact; rather it looks at the complete characteristics of individual members both inside and outside the immediate members. Also, it looks at long term views of the family such as how the family can deal with transitions and developmental stages across the life span. This is important to understand for professionals working with families because it teaches us to not judge the parenting. Most importantly, it tells us there are bigger reasons why problems develop within families beyond the parents. (Michael, forum 12)

The Family Systems Theory makes a lot of sense to me. Since my days in psychology I always realized how influential families can be on one another. Each member is raised on the ideas, opinions, and assumptions of their family. As a teacher, I believe that parents shape and mold their children more so than any teacher ever could. Each family member has an influence on a family one



way or another. Due to this reason it is extremely important as a teacher, I need to develop a relationship with each student's family in order to make sure the family influence with education is a positive one. By having a student's home family and school family working together the student will more than likely achieve great success. (Shaun, forum 12)

I've not looked at wholeness and subsystems this closely before. I always assumed that if I got to know a child over a few years, I would know the family too. That's not always true. (Carrie, forum 12)

In addition to my heightened awareness of diversity among families, recognizing the family as a system has also impacted my views in working with families. Thus far in my teaching career, I have taken little time to analyze the individual facets and characteristics of family and how the interaction of these typifies family behavior (including interaction and communication with schools and teachers)... I now understand that families are much like valuable antique watches—they are priceless, fragile, and have many intricate, moving parts that make them work. If one part of the intricacies is altered, a shift or change will occur in the entire family system. (Mitch, week 16, final reflection)

Reviewing the functioning of their family of origin provided teachers with the chance to safely reflect on family specific issues without feeling threatened in what they say. The sense that they should be politically correct in their assessment seemed to be important for the majority of teachers. This constraint may have prevented them from speaking freely. When they were describing and reflecting on their family, however, they were less fearful of being seen as unfair in their criticism. For example, teachers were able to write about how neglected they felt when their parents left them to take some time alone or to meet the needs of a sibling with special needs. Others were bothered that they were not included to the extent they would wish in family decisions. Many felt burdened in meeting family expectations. Self analysis, then, was a good exercise in preparing them to talk about sensitive issues while communicating with their project families and the families of their students. The following excerpts demonstrate the way teachers were able to apply their knowledge of Systems Theory to understand the functioning of their own family:

My mother worked till late at night and my step-dad enjoyed his time in the recliner watching television, so from age 9 on (when my brother was born) I began to care for my brother in the evenings... We also disengaged ourselves from interacting with my stepfather because he was not pleasant to be around. I suppose this did nothing to help our family cohesion, and only served to tear it down. However, I do find it interesting that the cohesion amongst ourselves seemed to grow stronger as we withdrew from him. (Beth, week 12, forum)

We, as children, didn't have much input into what we wanted or how things happened. My parents made those decisions. I think the roles that my parents took had a big impact in my life as a parent. I viewed things as not being equal growing up between my parents and I wanted it to be different when I got married. I think some things are different and some are the same. I believe that my husband and I are more equal in the decisions we make about our family. I have more equal say than my mom ever did. We are more equitable about the chores around the house. We don't have gender specific chores... Due to the role my parents had in my life I think it impacted me in more ways than I thought it did... I think that the lack of extended family had an impact on my life. (Sandra, week 12, forum)

Having the chance to think about and describe their family culture enabled teachers to realize that the unique combination of micro-cultures in their family had a great impact on their current personalities. Further, they realized that stressors are present in all families' lives regardless of the background and life style which influence the functioning of families. It also appeared that certain factors in families such as disability, financial difficulties, and health issues may have a greater impact on a family's functioning and interactions with schools so that teachers should be cognizant of these issues when dealing with families of their students. By evaluating their family as a system with subsystems and a system that functions in broader systems, teachers were guided towards understanding other family systems. The following segment from Margret's description of her project family and the feedback she received from her instructor (Gretchen) clearly shows the process of constructing a new understanding of how families function by using the newly gained knowledge of the System's Theory:

I feel that in Brittany's life she has had a low family cohesion for her early childhood development. I am making this statement after reading about the definition and implications of cohesion on page 43 and 44 of the text. I think that as time has passed and the stability that is found in Brittany's family now the cohesion is better. The family has a close emotional bonding and independence is being gained. Boundaries are still being developed for each family member. I hope with all my heart that this family stays together for Brittany's sake. I fear that if it falls apart so will she. (Margret, family journal, week 10)

...It appears that you will be provided with an excellent chance to learn how this family copes and maybe help them out as well! It seems that you are in an excellent position to do so since in some ways this story reminds me of some of the chaos you report experiencing in your own life as a child. (Gretchen, Margret's family journal, week 10)

Overall, the exercise of analyzing their family by using the Family Systems approach seemed to have helped teachers realize that schools and home can not be seen as different entities and that teachers need to work with families. Further, critical analysis of their families helped them understand the subcultures that impact their families and their own identity and heightened their awareness of influences their identity had on their professional practice.

#### *Hidden Personalities: Construction of a Meaningful Existence Through Deep Reflection*

*"Real power begins on the inside with self-awareness and self-acceptance."*

James Autry

As described by Carl Jung (1912), there are two sides to human personality: One that is a more pleasant person for every day wear and the other is a repressed self that remains in hiding most of the time. Jung refers to the "shadow side of the psyche" as the "Personal Shadow" which is masked by our more proper selves. If this side remains untamed, unexplored territory it poses the danger of being projected on to others in negative and some times harmful ways. Jung believed that accepting and integrating

shadow traits would restore sanity. If teacher education is to prepare teachers to be aware of their personal and professional identities that are committed to improve on their perspectives and practices, it is imperative that it targets the “personal shadow” in terms of addressing diversity, multicultural understanding, valuation of individuals regardless their background, and their understanding of social justice. Clearly, this curriculum did accomplish a step forward in helping teachers think about and interact with families. However, this accomplishment does not imply a complete change. Many more challenges still remain to be tackled in terms of teachers’ “self realization.” This study’s data indicates that full understanding, acceptance, and commitment was not fully accomplished by all of the participating teachers.

First, it was clear that professionals mostly came from a middle class background. They found similar values (e.g., importance of appearance, self reliance, socially acceptance) in themselves and tended to reinforce this type of “nice family” image by feeling closer to families familiar to them, who are more like themselves. This narrow focus poses the danger that some teachers will not connect with families not similar to them. Discomfort can create a barrier to family involvement and family-professional partnerships. Teachers need to work with all families regardless of their comfort level with the family or the family background. Educational equity could not be achieved if teachers judge families on standards that are rooted in their own understanding of what is socially proper. Even though this curriculum targeted helping teachers overcome these cultural barriers, over two-thirds of the teachers did find a project family with whom they felt comfortable and whose demographics greatly resembled theirs rather than picking a family that could benefit from this project. Initially the family selection process was

discussed during the restructuring of the course and it was suggested that the teachers would be required to do their projects with a family having a certain set of characteristics. However, after a long deliberation, it was agreed that it was best not to impose such requirements on the teachers but rather let them find their own family for the project. Then they were to be lead to explore their limits depending on their comfort level in a safe environment. This suggests that unless teacher education deliberately deals with the hidden personality trait described by Jung, not all teachers will challenge themselves and push their limits out of their comfort zone. Families that are least involved and most challenging are the ones that need school partnership services most. Unfortunately they seem to get the least attention from teachers.

Doing the lip service but not walking the talk appeared to be another issue that emerged under the theme of hidden personalities. For example, the message “Our job is to serve every one regardless how we perceive them, nice or not so nice” was carried out throughout the course. The majority of teachers echoed this same opinion. However, the tendencies they displayed in the selection of families for their Family Projects and their complaints about the time commitment this course required with the Family Project in their evaluations indicated that some were not committed enough to partnerships and were not walking the talk.

Some teachers maintained their judgmental attitudes in the way they view other families due to their personal identities even though they avoided doing it openly. For example, Jenny told about how her host family would talk loudly and yell at each other in their home during her visits. In her family journals towards the end of the course she compared them to her own quiet family in which they would not even call each other

from one room to another. In another example, Margret talked about how her Family Project mom had difficult time dealing with behavioral problems of her daughter. Margaret criticized her by stating, “they let her run the family and get whatever she wants, I am telling you if she was my daughter I guarantee that she would have not gotten away with so much.” This quote also clearly indicates that Margret was using her way of dealing with things as a frame of reference for what was the norm.

Many teachers had a preconceived notion of “normality” even though they avoided making this known to others. The most compelling evidence of such view was clearly demonstrated in the responses of teachers to vignette #3 in which they were asked to comment about the reaction of the mom to her daughter’s falling. The majority of teachers used the term “normal” to describe the reaction. In contrast, several teachers were able to see that no standard reaction can be expected from any mom as it will depend on the individual characteristics and circumstances of each.

Overall, this curriculum achieved all the goals set at the beginning of this chapter to an extent. The majority of teachers clearly gained the reflection skills and the ability to turn their gaze inward to study self. Many realized a level of understanding of the influence their background have on them. Further, many provided the signs of having transferred this new knowledge into practice and stated their determination to use most of the strategies and skills learned in the future. We should, however, recognize the fact that teacher education has not been fully successful in reaching deep into some teachers’ personalities. In this study some teachers had deeply rooted established beliefs and attitudes that were hard to change. Even though certain teachers sounded politically correct in most of their responses and claimed their practices to be so, sometimes their

real feelings surfaced in their narratives. These provided important clues to how they view others. Trust, partnership on equal grounds, being receptive to family input, desire to share power with families, recognizing differences in values, and in perspectives in dealing with issues are only few of the issues that remained unsettled. Clearly, it is impossible to think of teacher personalities, perspectives, attitudes, and actions as disjointed soliloquies that could be changed in isolation. The question is, however, how can we train and prepare teachers to orchestrate them in a way that enables them to treat others professionally?

## CHAPTER SIX

### Understanding Families: Seeing The Forest Not Just The Trees

In this chapter, themes that emerged under the “Understanding Families” category will be discussed. As described in the second developmental stage of the data analysis framework (see Chapter 3, Methods), having studied “self” in the first developmental stage, teachers now were expected to deduce a new conceptualization of the role families play in their children’s development in the context of the Systems Theory. The philosophy rooted in the foundation of this curriculum was for teachers to be effective in their work with students with special needs with diverse backgrounds, they needed to view school as an extension of students’ home and community rather than a separate entity. Therefore, instructors saw it imperative that teachers understand families of their students in the context of their society and culture, gain awareness of diversity among families, and develop positive attitudes and constructive competencies needed to work with these families. Instructors felt that allowing for a close relationship with a family would lead participant teachers to a deeper understanding of their students and family situations. Hence, as detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, they brought families on board as partners in order to provide input in the decision-making and curriculum design. They felt this was a way to ensure compatibility of home and at school practices. Similarly, they felt the strategy would lead to mutual understanding between school and home and create what the literature describes as the much needed support for both family and professional systems. They conjectured that as a result of family participation in the course, the barriers of miscommunication and distrust could be overcome so that all resources could be put to work for the well-being of the student.



The main competencies and skills that were targeted in this regard were the ability: (1) to initiate communication using such skills as listening and effective selection of appropriate words to use; (2) to recognize boundaries and show respect for these boundaries in their relationships; (3) to create two-way communication by sharing their information with families just as they expect families to share with them; and (4) share power in terms of decision making and the dynamics of the relationships established. In terms of disposition, teachers were expected to demonstrate not only willingness but a commitment to put these skills and competencies into practice by demonstrating that they view families as equal partners. In addition, teachers' skills in detecting, identifying, reflecting on, and altering undesirable views and assumptions they hold about families were targeted as a tool for attitudinal change.

The major tools that were used in targeting the skills, competencies, and dispositions for effective partnership were the constant sensitivity training that was realized through constant reflection in their encounters with new information throughout the course and the hands on experiences with real families. In the following section, how teachers experienced this component of the curriculum and responded to the intent via course activities will be shared.

### *Reaching Beyond The School Walls: Families Want Genuine Interest*

By using the Systems Theory as a framework, teachers came to understand why they need to be looking beyond the school walls in their effort to educate their students. After reviewing their family of origin in the systems context and understanding the impact their families have had on their identity development, teachers realized the role families play in their child's development. It became clear that education does not happen

at school only and that what goes on at school is highly impacted by what is happening at home and in the community. To be able to understand their students and the impact of their home environment on them, participant teachers realized that they needed to understand the mechanics of how each family is functioning in the systems context and that the tool to accomplish this is close relationships with families and observing them function in their environment. The majority of teachers demonstrated these realizations in their narratives as exemplified with the following quotation:

Before this class began I had a perception that the only world that existed was the one inside the four walls I was in. I was aware of the other lives but I did not actively engage them. I tried to keep my personal life and my school life separate. I still think you need to do that but at the same time I need to be able to open my heart and mind to the needs of my students and their families more. I have seen, through the work I have done with my project family, the benefits brought on by this close open working environment. My project student has made tremendous gains in his attitude, behavior, and academic performance... The rapport I have built up with his parents has also helped in the classroom. I have seen some of the challenges they encounter on a daily basis and have grown to appreciate the work that they put in daily. You gain a new perspective on things when you are introduced to a view that is different than yours. (Shane, week 16 final reflection)

The course outlook on families also helped teachers develop a new appreciation for what families do. Noted in literature, teachers tend to see school failure and ineffectual performance of students as a result of the socio-psychological deprivation due to social conditions of child and family (Souza Barros & Elia, 1998). The new appreciation teachers developed for families when they experienced how hard these families work to make the best of their circumstances for the well being of their children, made teacher participants realize their tendency to look at families from a very limited perspective. Michael and Wessin's quotes were representative of the comments of many teachers who admitted that now they could see the bigger picture and understand that due

to the hardships families go through, school's expectations from families may not be realistic.

Before the class, I really did not think about all that families have on their plate to deal with. School and education is just one of several functions, which the parents have to meet daily for their children. In B. County, economics may take precedent in some families over education. Before, I would just think if a parent does not attend a case conference, this means they do not want to be involved in their child's planning for classes. Now, my perspective on families' involvement has changed. (Michael, final reflection)

As special educators it is easy to forget that we are but one piece in the puzzle of our students' lives. It is not surprising that more than once I have called a parent deeply concerned about a student, and the parent seemed distant - and somewhat annoyed about my call. When families are juggling different functions, to have a teacher call concerned that Johnny is making pig noises when girls walk by can seem meaningless. I especially liked the vignette in our book on page 67, I think this pointed out that as special educators we must look at the entire picture and our place in it before we ask parents to take on additional tasks. (Wessin, week 13 forum)

As also documented in chapter 5, the majority of teachers stated that the Family Systems Theory made sense for them and provided them with the needed framework to view families holistically; that is, they felt they saw the forest not only the trees. They were able to reflect on how they focus on negative characteristics of families based on their preconceptions, prejudices, or faulty assumptions. After weeks of visiting the homes of their project families and experiencing the families' circumstances, participant teachers realized that they should not rely upon what they hear from others or assume to know families from scant interaction. The following comments document teachers' realization of how much they had relied on their assumptions:

First, I will view students as an extension of their family, rather than a reflection of it. In the past, having met or talked with parents, I have occasionally viewed a student's behavior as a reflection of their parents: their attitudes, mental functioning level, etc. Instead of just writing a student off, as a lost cause, because there will be no support from home, I will try to connect with the family.

Evidently there is a reason or many reasons parents act in the manner they do toward the school and its personnel. (Dodson, week 16 final reflection)

The most profound influence on this transformation has been getting to know my subject family more intimately. Prior to meeting them, much of what I knew or thought I knew about Cody and the Joneses, was mostly conjecture and speculation. Only in meeting, interacting, and talking to them on a weekly basis, did I fully appreciate the complexity of the interactions that went on between them, the school, its teachers, and the community. (Jeff, week 16 final reflection)

Especially through what they learned in the Family Project, teachers were able to observe many functions families carry out in their daily lives. Most came to realize that they as teachers tend to forget that families have other responsibilities. Hence, teachers should not expect every family to see education as the one function around which their world revolves.

Through their conversations with their Project Families, teachers came to realize the importance of genuine relationships with families. In most of the examples and observations teachers provided in their Family Journals, the pattern that surfaced in the narratives was that the school/teachers were not genuine in their intentions and actions but were rather only playing the role of including families. They learned that surface interaction by school personnel was a common complaint among families about their early times in the special education system. In the following examples, Jacie and Jeff wrote about the perceptions of their project families about their IEP meetings:

They remembered being frustrated about different issues and feeling like they were not heard. This is when Sandy realized you just have to fight until you get what you need for your child. They felt like they would suggest something, and it wasn't really heard. Sandy said, "It seemed like in that first meeting our comments and ideas were just kind of nodded at, and then they moved on. From

what I remember I do not think they really listened to what we were asking, or suggesting.” (Jacie, family journal week 9)

She also said that her voice was not valued as the parent, but rather as someone who knew very little about education or students with special needs. When the principal said that they were going to do something and she didn’t agree they seemed surprised that a “parent” would not agree with the principal. Denise said that she had to become quite forceful in order to get the types of services that she felt was best for Evan. (Jeff, family journal week 9)

The IEP process was the most frequently cited situation in which school’s and teachers’ intentions and actions found to be hypocritical and problematic. Teachers were able to hear families’ complaints about several issues in relation to the IEP processes. They became aware that most families felt that they were not fully included in the IEP process and that their perspectives were not heard or not valued. They felt that their concerns and priorities for their children were disregarded by school personnel due to the fact that staff did not have the time and motivation to listen. Participating teachers found that the majority of parents reported that their experiences were stressful and dissatisfying. This was partially attributed to the fact that they could not understand many things that professionals said. Generally, they felt so left out in the IEP process. Participants learned that facing a group of professionals alone made families feel intimidated. They also reported that these types of complaints were more commonly seen with families who either were new to the system or coming from lower SES backgrounds that did not have the knowledge, experience, and the means to navigate the complex special education system. A similar trend has been documented in the literature that describe the impact of social stratification on intergroup relations and life outcomes. In her study Brantlinger (2003) describes how background of teachers and families impact the power relationships stating “I believe that these demographic differences align with unique positions in a social class hierarchy and therefore correlate with their distinctive

stand points and the power they held relative to one another to set school policy and influence school practice” (p. 79). Further she asserts “...the poor not only loose out in power relations and material distribution but also in negative aspersions about their intellectual attributes.” (p.35). This problematic area seemed to be a specific target of this curriculum as the instructors encouraged teachers to critically think about this reality. Gretchen’s response to one journal entry amplifies what teachers had realized and pushed them even harder to help them understand the magnitude of the problem:

... It's all very well to explain to Toots that she had rights. She did not have the skills needed to act on her rights! there are MANY, MANY, MANY families like this in special education.(and in fact the middle class articulate families who advocate for their students that many of you have as project families are the exception, not the rule.) The parents of many of our students are intimidated by the system that fails to engage them in the process except in very specified ways. (Come to a parent meeting, attend an IEP, sign the forms) Then we accuse them of not caring about their children when they do not respond to a system they do NOT understand. A researcher once interviewed parents leaving an initial IEP meeting for their children at a randomly selected number of school sites. Over half of the time, the parent had no idea what was said at the meeting. (Gretchen, forum 7)

On the other hand, assertive families, families with considerable experience, families who were professionals themselves, or those who had managed to secure a professional to be on their side were found to feel fairly comfortable with the process. It was clear to participants that these empowered families made sure they were heard and wee able to individualize their child’s IEP to the highest extent possible. Teachers had observed that the amount of services provided often depended on the assertiveness of families. The following excerpts demonstrate who they felt gets the services and gets to be heard:

Professionally both parents being in health care fields, and Tammy working with other individuals with disabilities, are to their advantage. Their co-workers can support them. Tammy also has a sister who works in special education who is able to make sure the laws are followed and supports are appropriate for Summer. (Lyndsay, week 11, family journal)

I now also realize that as being educators my project family were not only colleagues to the professionals in the schools, but also part of the intelligent, middle class the schools cater to. This variable makes a huge impact on the comfort and collaboration between the family and school...(Sarah, final reflection)

When I asked Mrs. Smith about her first IEP meeting she said, “The entire process of all of the people sitting around, people dressed professionally, and I was just the scummy house mom.” Mrs. Smith told me that now she feels very comfortable going to school and attending an IEP meeting, because she has attended so many. She said that she has no problem speaking out now; unlike before where she would just agree with what it said on the IEP. (York, week 7, family journal)

I feel that this is an unusual IEP because there is so much information from the family. ...(wish I could say that about all IEP’s that come across my desk). This is proof to me that parents are given the opportunity if they “KNOW” what is available to help in the IEP process.(Ron, week 8, family journal)

Based on the testimonies of project families, it seemed in some cases that professionals had included families in the discussions and listened to them. However, when teachers reviewed the IEP document, they realized that family input had been mostly disregarded and so was not recorded in the official document. Teachers understood that regardless of the particular families’ assertiveness, the opinions/requests of families were overlooked in the official service provisions as well. Participants realized that this absence of voice in documents meant that schools/professionals were not always genuine in their intentions to partner with families but rather did it to meet requirements. The school and teachers tended to maintain the status quo. The following section from Lawa documents this tendency:

Brent's parents stated for the IEP that their vision for the student is to attain social skills to go to school for an entire day. This vision is not addressed anywhere in the IEP. It also says that their concerns are safety and socialization growth. Shouldn't these items of been address in the IEP in some way since these are the main vision/goals that the parents have for their child? I don't feel that the IEP reflects the concerns of the family. No intervention effort is set up in this IEP. The behavior therapist is always a part of these meetings and nothing is documented (because he doesn't usually offer anything) from him. Brent's classroom behavior and lack of academic behavior is almost always addressed at these meetings, yet there is nothing in the IEP that states any of these concerns. (Lawa, week 8, family journal)

Reviewing the IEP's in the light of information families provided, it became clear to course members that the majority of families' suggestions, desires, or plans for their children were not included in the official document and therefore did not have an impact as much as we would expect from a partnership on the final decisions made and the implementation of services. Based on these findings, teachers realized that genuine family-professional partnerships are not widespread practices. They were be able identify IEP processes as the #1 concern of families and how important it is to hear the voices of families and value their contribution to the process.

Hearing about these problematic areas, looking through the IEP's of their family project member, and reflecting on ways that IEP processes were conducted at their schools, the reflective thought process about these issues and how they could be improved was evident in the discourse of teachers. This reflective process enabled teachers to verify problematic sides in their own practices and develop the will and strategies to overcome them. The following quotes document this thought process:

I will begin conducting the IEP meetings and case conferences a little bit different than I have done in the past. It has always been expressed in the past that I need to have the IEP already filled out prior to the case conference. While this probably shortens the length of the meeting, it doesn't permit the parents and family members the opportunity to be fully involved in the formation of the IEP.



This is an integral aspect of our families feeling involved in the educational progression and planning for their own children. (Adam, week 16, final reflection)

I think my corporation does a particularly poor job at preserving the intent of the IEP process, especially at involving families in the brainstorming and designing of their child's individualized plan...I plan to bring a school laptop to each case conference henceforward in order to create the IEP with the actual committee. In the past, I was led to believe that it was unprofessional for me to arrive without a pre-created IEP document; now I believe it is unprofessional for me to arrive with one the parents did not help create. Hopefully, by making this small change, I will encourage parents not to sit idly by as recipients of professionals' decisions, but rather to actively participate in the process.(Beth, week 16, final reflection)

The inclusion of families in the educational process was at the core of the topics discussed throughout the course. Each lesson dealt with enhancing the teacher-family relationships either through specific practices or getting course members to seek a greater understanding of a family's situation. The vignettes all aimed at showing the teachers that the families they work with come from different perspectives with different worries and agendas and without establishing genuine relationships with each family based on their situation, it would not be possible to reach families and work with them effectively. The family project provided the opportunity to look into the life of a family. As documented above, these activities seemed to have a strong enough impact that enabled teachers to identify the things they are doing wrong in terms of including families and develop the will to improve them.

*Teachers Putting Themselves in Families' Shoes: Families Want to be Understood Not Judged*

To help teachers gain an understanding of family perspective, participant teachers were frequently asked to think about and reflect on their personal experiences in which they did not hold professional roles. They were to think about situations from the

family's side instead of the professional side. This facilitated teachers' remembrance of how it felt to be mistreated or ignored. This activity seemed to help teachers understand how families felt. Further, it made them more cognizant of flaws in their practices. Such activities enabled teachers to consider the problems for family members who do not have the same means, connections, education, and status as professionals do. This seemed to have ignited a deeper sympathy towards families and made teachers realize that they need to "think twice and act once" before they judge families' actions based on their assumptions. The following excerpts demonstrate the empathy and understanding teachers gained as they thought about their situations:

I can only say that as a parent it is a totally different perspective that you are in compared to being a professional in the school. Just attending the conference for my son when he was tested for speech, it was just a different feeling. I almost felt uncomfortable, and I am a teacher in the building. Maybe I was just nervous. (Carrie, week 8, family journal)

Parents are not encouraged to participate and the school complains when they don't participate. As far as sharing the data from the student's evaluation with the parents, they are sent the paper work before they have a face to face meeting. Now, when I received my daughter's results in the mail, I looked at it and didn't understand how to interpret the scores. It was difficult for me to understand and I am studying/teaching special education. I can't begin to imagine how my student's parents must feel when they open the results up. (Lawa, week 8, family journal)

The family I worked with for my family project was a critical part in helping me understand what happens to a family outside of the school walls. Debbie never stopped when she was at home. Her life was consumed with taking care of her daughter. Sometimes I think my life is busy and hectic, but when I look at how parents of children with disabilities have to give up so much, I cannot help but feel guilty for complaining about my life. (Kari, week 16, final reflection)

I already knew that there were many outside factors that influenced a student's learning, school day, and beliefs. What I hadn't realized before was how families cope with educational, health, social, emotional, and behavioral issues. (Lyndsay, week 16, final reflection)

A challenge that seemed to remain for some teachers, however, was their ability to automatize this kind of thinking in which they could constantly switch between their professional view and family view in their encounters. This was especially hard for teachers who were not parents or had little experience in the profession. Another interference with this perspective switch was with teachers who were opinionated about norms and values and tended to see their own conduct as the norm. As cited in the pervious chapter, Margaret thought that her project family mother's inability to control her daughter's behaviors as simply spoiling her. Margaret stated her observation of the mother in comparison with the way she managed her own daughter. Evidently, she was able to switch to a parental perspective but still failed to sympathize with the other mom Margaret's case led me to conclude that a well defined, step by step reflective thought process framework should be developed and modeled with teachers in their training to ensure that they do not arrive at conclusions before they complete required steps to adequately evaluate the situation.

As documented in Chapter 5, the majority of teachers were able to identify and deal with their misconceptions, assumptions, and prejudices. Based on the information received from their project families and the co-instructor family members, they also realized that this was an area which most families felt the need for teachers to improve. Families wanted teachers to avoid judging them, listen to them, understand them, and allow them the power to negotiate the nature of their child's education. Chris's comment reveals this new understanding of how a teacher could connect with families effectively:

If our goal is to establish and maintain relationships with families then we, as educators, would need to drop the attitude that the parents are always at fault and to be blamed for all the misbehavior and poor attitudes of the child. We need to

address the whole child, as a work in progress with potentials, not a brewing inevitable failure. Listening to the family is a crucial part of that. Even if we disagree on values and means to an end, we have to find a level of equality to work on for the best interest of the child. (Chris, week 16, final reflection)

Families communicated that “Teachers need to remember that families are the ones who will live with these children for the rest of their lives, not the teachers and teachers should remember that families have more at stake.” This type of response from the families made teachers realize that it should not be that easy to blame these families when they are the principal ones who want the best for their children.

### *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Don't Sort*

As supported by the findings in chapter 5, families who were involved in the course and the deliberate activities seemed to have been able to communicate their message to teachers that no two families are the same and that teachers should be cognizant of this fact in their interactions and expectations from families. Participant teachers realized that they should get over the attitude of sorting people- a general tendency in special education. They learned they should eschew their tendency to feel in control and manage relationships in a uniform manner. After they learned about the micro-cultures that impact family structures, interactions, and reactions and the need to be aware of such differences in circumstances as they interact with families, teachers came to realize that methods of working and interacting with each family should be deliberate and well suited to each family in order to be effective in partnering.

Participant teachers learned, for example, that due to different circumstances in their lives, some families may not be inclined to get involved in schools and their children's education. Teachers realized that they could not depend on one strategy but

employ distinctive ways of work with different families. They came to understand that working with families effectively takes deliberately designed plans based on understanding the unique circumstances of each family-that their actions should be tailored specifically for each family.

The realization that families respond to school in different ways due to their diverse circumstances, and their own need to differentiate strategies was reiterated as teachers reported on the families' responses to home visits. Teachers learned that for some families home visits were acceptable because they were middle class families whose cultures matched that of school's and teachers. On the other hand it was apparent to teachers that, some families were not as comfortable with home visits. It was evident that some families did not want teachers coming into their homes to check on what is lacking. Some teachers reported that families asserted that their home life was a personal matter and they did not want teachers to cross the boundary into their personal space.

I would love it if Carrie's teacher came to visit my home and saw what our life is like outside of school. I know he would get an eye-opener and understand where I am coming from when I refuse to do certain things or when Carrie is really tired at school. If teachers could understand how busy we are and all of the personal time given up for our children, they may work better with us because they know what we face and go through everyday. (Carrie, week 16 family journal)

I think it would be beneficial for a teacher to make a home visit if there was a problem going on that needs to be dealt with. I wouldn't feel comfortable with home visits if they were to happen every month. (Dodson, week 16 family journal)

I wouldn't want teachers to visit my home all the time. I don't want professionals coming into my home to check whether my water is running or not. If teachers are committed to partnering with families it should matter for them where families prefer to meet. This could be a local Mc Donald's or a park. The preference and comfort of the family is as important as teachers. (Elizabeth, Family member co-instructor face-to-face interview Jan 27 2006)

This diversity among families was also evident to teachers based on their children's life cycle or the specific manifestations of their disabilities. Some families were concerned about physical needs, some about social and emotional needs, and some about medical or academic needs. Hearing about such diverse situations and needs, made teachers realize that they should think on an individual basis for each student and family.

Another difference about families showed itself in their comfort level in talking about monetary issues. Families who identified themselves as middle class, tended to have difficulty talking about monetary problems. In contrast, lower SES families seemed to be more comfortable in this regard. For example, Jacie reports on the response of her project family "I asked the family about their qualification for such monetary support. They seemed to not really want to talk about it. They appeared to have a difficult time with this." The same tendency was seen with teachers: those from traditional white-middle class backgrounds found it hard to talk about financial issues. Lyndsay's comment exemplifies this tendency:

For me, financial matters are very personal. So, upon our first meeting, I did not feel comfortable talking with the family about financial matters. I will ask them more about their financial capabilities once I get to know them better. Obviously, they have the financial capacity to care for this child, otherwise, the judge would not have granted them custody so quickly. (Lyndsay, family journal 2)

Teachers came to the realization that they need to approach families with which they work, with the awareness that it is hard for any one to ask for help and make their problems known in this world in which self reliance and appearance is valued so much. An indicator of this understanding, all teachers enrolled in the course asked their project families whether they were aware of the resources in their community and how they were utilizing these resources. Teachers were not always quick in directing families to

resources perhaps because they were not aware of them. The course instructors made it clear that teachers should not jump to conclusions about families' desire or need to utilize specific resources based on their assumptions. Teachers were instructed to inquire the situation first by asking families whether they would consider utilizing these resources. After families express an interest in resources, teachers were then encouraged to assist them in finding information about the availability of such resources. Overall, results indicate that the curriculum had accomplished a great deal in terms of helping teachers realize that "one size or even several sizes will not fit all."

### *Stone Soup*

Data indicates that families who were involved in this course (i.e., family-member co-instructors, project families) communicated how they view their contribution to the educational processes effectively. It was evident that this message was received by the majority of teachers. The message endorsed by families and reinforced with course activities was that everyone has something to contribute regardless of their background, abilities, education, or involvement level and, therefore, they should get their chance to do so. As mentioned in Chapter I in the literature review, teachers were the key to this process. It was found that teachers accepted this idea and gave evidence that they were becoming facilitators in including families. This resonates with the tale of "Stone Soup" that everyone should be able to contribute ideas- the stone, a carrot, or potato, water, or the stirring. The moral of that story is that no matter what contribution, everyone should enjoy the warm feeling and satisfaction of having accomplished something through a group effort. The tale implies that teachers should not fall into the trap of trying to sort people according to their perceptions of whose contribution was the most or least

valuable. A saying that resonated in many teachers' narrative was: "It takes a village to raise a child." Teachers came to understand that being a facilitator for such communal acts to happen must be their responsibility, especially with families less involved and harder to reach. The following excerpt from Katherine is a good example that represents how many exhibited this realization:

Before this class I believed I did a decent job establishing effective relationships with the parents of the students in my class. I now realize I worked well with the parents that were interested or motivated on their own to be a part of the classroom, but I did not put much effort into reaching out to those families that did not show an interest in creating a partnership with the school. The importance of establishing partnerships with all parents, even those not previously inclined to do so, is now evident to me. I now believe I am equipped with the necessary skills and information to attempt and hopefully succeed at developing effective partnerships with all parents. (Katherine, week 16 final reflection)

This inclusive attitude will ensure that all students and families are served equitably because the input of diverse families was valued. Teachers adopting this disposition, will be a step towards overcoming the common problem of schools being designed and run in a way that privileges typical white middle class culture and students.

*Families Fit the School Culture vs. School Fitting the Families' Culture: Enacting Negotiation*

Results indicate that teachers were in the midst of a transition in their understanding of cultural interactions within schools, communities, and families. As stated in the literature review in Chapter 1, with the transformation in the racial, ethnic, and cultural composition of the US society and the mounting diversity within schools, it became obvious that to effectively educate this broad range of students, school personnel will have to take a multifaceted approach. The literature revealed that this transformation is slow because schools continue to be based on typical middle class culture. Teachers



reported that their schools are constantly pushing them to accomplish their agendas by meeting the standards with limited resources. This seemed to have created a school culture that caused separation between schools and the communities they operate in rather than operating in orchestration with the communities and families they serve. This approach appeared to create an obstacle for teacher-family interactions and teachers due to these demands of their school culture became blinded to the fact that school/teachers should account for the impact of and work with families in educational matters. The following excerpt from Stacey's final reflection clearly documents this attitude present in the field and demonstrates her realization of the need for teachers to alter their view of the function of these two settings:

I think there is an assumption that what goes on at school is "school stuff" and what goes on at home is "home stuff" and the two are very different places, not much related to one another. While it is true that school and home environments are very different from each other, the student is the common variable that has to learn to successfully navigate the expectations of both places. Despite the differences between school environments and home environments, most skills a student needs to be successful in one place also apply to many others. Therefore, it is in the student's best interest for the people interacting with him or her in each and all environments to work together towards common goals for the student's success...(Stacy, Forum 14)

When teachers were exposed to activities in which they would review and understand how their school is functioning in its community it became clear to them that many schools mainly prefer to operate on their own without the input and support from their communities. The more the schools turned inward to solidify their insular system with strict rules and procedures, the more they become closed systems detached from communities and families. Perhaps the analogy of schools becoming like castles in the middle of their communities best illustrates this notion best. Such schools become increasingly guarded in their work toward the outside. Teachers' testimonies indicate that

schools do not like families questioning their practices or the way they use their resources. Hence, school professionals' interactions with systems outside of school minimal, artificial rather than genuine, losing the expressed focus of nurturing the community life. Teachers' observations of the way IEP meetings are conducted, their descriptions of policies on home visits (i.e., many teachers stated that their administration did not allow them to make home visits). As in Ellie's example, "I started visiting homes after this course and was told by some people that I should not be going in some of these places that I go to." In some school districts limited opportunities were given to families to be involved in any type of school function. These are examples of schools self-protective practices that keep families and communities at bay.

Pressures in some school environments had a great impact on teachers' practices. Many mentioned not being allowed by their administration and school district to check particular accommodations in the IEP's because that would necessitate services that they felt would be too costly. The school focusing on system priorities that cause teachers to become detached from the realities and needs of families/their students was demonstrated in the IEP process in this chapter. The majority of participant teachers talked about how they were required to fill in the IEPs of their students before the case conferences. This was done for the sake of shortening the time of the meeting and looking professional and in control. This finding implies that schools want to carry out their agendas by disregarding the needs of students and families. Drawing such thick lines between personnel and families make schools impenetrable castles that are unresponsive to their communities.

The heavy schedules of teachers due to the pressures and the demands of standards-based education was another distraction that teachers said prevented them from collaborating with families and communities. Almost all of the teachers talked about how they got little prep time and even that time often was taken away to conduct meetings not built into their schedules. Many teachers expressed the fact that they have taken little time in trying to understand the bigger picture and see the function of families in educating their students. The following quotes exemplify teachers' awareness of limited focus,

Thus far in my teaching career, I have taken little time to analyze the individual facets and characteristics of family and how the interaction of these typifies family behavior, including interaction and communication with schools and teachers. (Mitch, final reflection)

Before this class began I had a perception that the only world that existed was the one inside the four walls I was in. I was aware of the other lives but I did not actively engage them. I tried to keep my personal life and my school life separate. (Shane, final reflection)

My project family and our parent instructors really allowed me to understand the personal relationships with children with disabilities. It helped me to see the child as part of a family, instead of a student with a disability alone. They are all part of a family community, and their lives at school are strongly influenced by their family's values and norms. Understanding where they come from is so important in order to help them, and all of the personal stories we heard really helped drive that concept home. (Heather, final reflection)

The evidence of attitudinal shifts was supported in narratives by announcement of new understandings gained in this class. In addition, teachers expressed their determination to continue using family-centered practices. Many conveyed a hope to create systematic change in their schools. Some said that they will be doing home visits, have more frequent communication with families in many different formats, and on much more frequent basis, whereas many said that they will change the way they conduct IEP conferences.

I will begin conducting the IEP meetings and case conferences a little bit different than I have done in the past. It has always been expressed in the past that I need to have the IEP already filled out prior to the case conference. While this probably shortens the length of the meeting, it doesn't permit the parents and family members the opportunity to be fully involved in the formation of the IEP. This is an integral aspect of our families feeling involved in the educational progression and planning for their own children. Testimonials were shared from teachers in our class who have recently tried this within their case conferences and positive responses and feedback was the result. I expect and hope to involve the parents of my students in the educational planning with the IEP. It may be an initial hard sell to my principal and other special education staff. However, I think that once they see the positive outcomes of involving our students' parents in this way, they will begin to understand that this is an instrumental practice that will allow parents to feel more directly involved. (Adam, week 16 final reflection)

### *What Constitutes A Healthy And Functional Family?*

An overwhelming majority of teachers talked about traditional family values instilled in them growing up and originally seemed to be so proud of carrying on those values in their own lives. Despite beginning the course by being embedded in their middle-class, white, traditional family culture, teachers came a long way in a more reflective and empathetic view of families. That is said, some teachers still had difficulty in overcoming their biased frame of reference about what constitutes healthy and functional family. For example, many talked about divorce being a traumatic event in a family's life rather than seeing it from a systems perspective as a strategy that might allow a family unit to remain functional. From a systems perspective the family system resembles the human body. In making this comparison, it would be illogical to keep a leg or an arm with gangrene that would contaminate or kill the human. Some teachers were not able to translate the system perspective to their view of families. Others, including Gunther hold a system-centered outlook:

Self-esteem was more of an issue when Dad was around than it is now. It used to be that they were always on M's back about something or putting him down where his behavior was concerned. The funny thing is that my wife and I have always seen him as a very well behaved and sweet little boy and could never figure out what they were griping about. With out dad complaining all the time (because HE couldn't handle it) Mom has less to complain about and M's behavior has improved greatly. M's ADHD used to be an embarrassment, or at least an issue."Gunther, family journal)

Teachers had difficulty breaking out their limited perspectives regarding family structure. This became apparent in their selection of project families and in the way they talked about family functionality in their forum discussions and in their family journals. Most held the belief that divorce or single parenthood was threatening to the children and damaging to the family's social image and respectability. It was "shocking" for Margret to discover that her project family mother was in her 4<sup>th</sup> marriage. Margret explained that this was something she was not used to seeing in her family or community culture. She admitted that the current husband did bring stability to the family. Yet, even this assumption may have been rooted in her understanding of a functional family as one with married couples. Jeff spoke about his surprise in learning that the father in his project family was not the biological father of the son. He elaborated that: "The relationship between Dave and Chris seemed so typical and David was so loving" Jeff inferred that people not related by blood can not love each other like typical/biological father-son relationships. His assumption was that non-traditional families would not be expected to be as functional as traditional ones. These examples suggest that some teachers did not fully grasp the Systems Perspective or were not be able to transfer that knowledge to their daily understanding of families. To some extent these limitations created barriers to teachers' open-mindedness.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Re-conceptualization of Professional Roles Within Systems Theory Context

In this chapter, how teachers reconstructed their understanding of their professional roles as ambassadors of systems change will be documented. The six areas teachers built their understanding of their professional role around included: listening for understanding; successful inclusion of families; avoiding disabling judgments; being resourceful; communicating sincerity and trustworthiness; and being ready to work against the grain.

#### *Listening for Understanding*

Teachers came to understand that the ability to listen is actually half of communication. They were taught that for communication to be used to gain understanding, they could not understand others without listening and understanding their perspectives. As documented in Chapter 6, teachers felt that families complained most about miscommunication between school and home. Families told teachers about their feelings of not being heard, and families discussed not being informed about their children's daily tasks in the classroom. Parents discussed difficulties they experienced in understanding field-related terminology that professionals used. They gave examples of cases in which they did not understand teachers due to the teachers' technical word selection in their communication. Parents conveyed that their feelings had been hurt when teachers seemed to be putting them down. For example Jeanne elaborated:

My oldest daughter has an IEP because of her ADHD and trichotillomania (a hair pulling disorder). There have been times when teachers have looked at me as if saying that I should just be "able to make her stop" doing things that are impulsive or compulsive because I am the parent. One teacher made a statement last year while having a phone conversation with him. He said, "I hope you are

getting her some good counseling!” I felt like he was talking down to me. The way he said it just didn’t set well with me at first. (Jeanne, forum 4)

Toward the end of the course, participant teachers stated on many occasions that it was important to listen to families before and after important meetings and incorporate the information they provided into official documents. Further, they learned that they should reflect families’ perspectives in their practices. The majority of teachers talked about how they communicated with families through phone calls, daily logs, face-to-face meetings, and e-mail. They stated that this class had enabled them to see their professional responsibilities. They also learned about different forms and means of communication.

Another point indicated by teachers as helpful in communicating with families was to share some personal information as they talked with families. This approach was felt to help personalize the conversations and it sent the message that “we understand you, we have been there, we are not so different from you.” These messages conveyed empathy and sincerity of teachers to the families. Meca’s comment exemplifies this realization:

I told Pam that I understand where she is coming from and shared with her the hardships we experienced as a family because my mom was divorced and had to take care of her family by herself. I mentioned how I remember mom did not have time for herself and had to wear her happy face on while with us no matter what she had gone through that day. Pam seemed to feel more comfortable as she listened to me. I think sharing personal information does help in communicating with families. (Meca, week forum 8)

A number of teachers who took the class had a child/children or another family member with a disability. The impact of sharing their frustrations and triumphs with families was evident in their descriptions of relationships they established with families. It made a real difference in how families and teachers understood each other. Other

teachers admitted that even though they work with students with disabilities they thought it impossible to understand how it feels to have a child with a disability until it happens to one personally. They therefore thought that they should try to be as open minded as possible in their relationships with families in order to avoid misconceptions. This could be considered a step forward in their thinking about their role in communicating with families.

### *Successful Inclusion of Families*

Through interactions with their project families and listening to their accounts of their experiences with schools and teachers, it became evident to participant teachers that partnerships could not happen if there was only symbolic inclusion of families. In the Week 15 Forum Discussions, many teachers stated their realization that the school system is actually not inclusive. They described parents' feelings that the system did not account for the needs of students who deviate from mainstream culture. For example, many teachers commented on how students who did not envision college in their future generally did not get the attention they needed and did not feel prepared for the life skills essential to survive. Teachers realized the gap between the curriculum and students' needs. They were able to recognize that school culture is established around the mainstream customs and the curriculum was created by people who were not in touch with the realities of families from diverse backgrounds. In their reflections, they emphasized that a professional role they should assume was to put the utmost effort forward to ensure that their curriculum and instruction is sensitive to the needs of students and their families who came from diverse backgrounds.



Although sometimes teachers' tone sounded critical of the unwillingness of parents to get involved in their children's schooling, teachers seemed enthusiastic about their role in ensuring that all families and especially families from diverse backgrounds were involved in school functions. However, a disturbing finding was that teachers tended to overlook the essence of real family-school partnerships because of their ambition to involve families in whatever way possible. Findings indicate that, when teachers suggested ways to improve family-school relationships and involve the least involved families, all teachers suggested at least one strategy that was linked to providing some type of reward such as food, gifts, or prizes. The phenomenon is exemplified by these comments:

We want parents to be involved! When we offer pizza or dinner we usually have a good crowd. On math night we hand out packets with lots of family activities. We each teach a strategy or demonstrate a new way to do math or use math. We also give bonus points for those attending and lots of prizes. Our math night always has the best attendance. We advertise it as free fun and we make it happen. The parents that attend tell their friends and each year gets bigger. We make sure that the whole family has fun. We even offer baby-sitting! We have the student honor society or student council as volunteers and they earn credit points towards their goal. (Gressma, week 16 final reflection)

These particular activities do have a great turnout, which perpetuates the point made in the text with the story about Karen McGee: To borrow and alter a line from Field of Dreams... If you feed them, they will come. (Beth, week 9 forum)

This suggests that teachers may see education and the involvement of families from a business perspective. This may undermine the genuine relationships that should be based simply on caring and genuine concerns about the best interest of students. From my cultural perspective, this attitude would have been understood as an insult to families because it implied that families are interested in a free dinner or some other material rather than in their children's welfare.

### *Avoiding Disabling Judgment*

Through the course activities, it became clear that many teachers had realized that, they had biases, prejudices, misconceptions, or assumptions that may cause them to judge others based on their values, norms, and experiences. As presented in Chapters 5 and 6, such judgmental attitudes not only cause misconceptions about families and prevent teachers from really knowing and understanding the families and their actions, but also interfere with constructive partnering relationships. Therefore, they learned that among their professional responsibilities was to be open identifying their own personality flaws through constant reflection, and willingness to overcome these flaws.

Some teachers' inability to get past their judgmental attitudes and assumptions remained a barrier. These attitudes caused teachers to be unwilling to make the extra effort to involve families. York wrote about her reaction to a family:

I think that we need to be realistic and try our best to communicate with parents, but after getting a verbal and written agreement that a child was going to attend the program and then having the child not be home when the bus stopped at their home was surprising. As a result of this I have decided that as educators we need to do our best to try to involve families and that the family is also responsible for the being involved in school. We can only do so much and in the case mentioned above the program was super successful for many of the students and most of them participated. We did not let a few ruin it for the group. (York, week 16 final reflection)

York's narrative implies that she has not taken the reflection she practiced in this class to heart so that she still had a judgmental attitude that blamed families. Her comments demonstrate that she was trying to draw a clear line between her and the parents' responsibilities. She felt she did not need to cross that line to take extra steps for her students. The course curriculum aimed at helping teachers reach a greater

understanding of families' circumstances and instill in them that they should be patient and resourceful. They were also to avoid being judgmental before they understood the reasons behind families' actions. In this case, York did not follow up with asking why a student did not come, but quickly blamed the family for not being responsible in following their agreement to making sure that the student was there when the bus came. By inquiring the family directly, York could have found out whether his missing the bus was due to ignorance and lack of responsibility or legitimate reasons.

### *Being Resourceful*

This sub-theme encompassed ways in which teachers' re-conceptualization of their professional roles happened. First of all, teachers came to understand that it was their responsibility to come up with a variety of strategies to communicate with families and facilitate partnerships. In some cases the few strategies they may have had in their repertoires may not have worked with all families. So it was crucial that they be patient and resourceful. Lawa's comment indicates her use of strategies:

The group talks through problem areas and offers ideas but it always seems like the family and I are the only ones that follow through on anything. I write daily accounts of Brent's day and send it out to the entire team. Mom is the only one that responds to questions I have in these daily accounts (the behavior consultant has responded once, but only after mom contacted him via email). I would like to see more interaction from the behavior consultant. I am optimistic at this time though because he is meeting with mom and I this week to discuss a home behavior plan that supports the school plan. (Lawa, family journal)

Teachers were cognizant that not all teachers would be as willing to put an extra effort into making valued things happen for children or their families. Marjorie's frustration with other teachers' attitudes was demonstrated when she said, "It seems to me that many in the field don't care to go any further than their own bias, frame of

reference, --go "the extra mile"- to look deep enough to determine the root problem and what to do to help the child as much as possible.” The idea of getting to know students on an individual basis and from close relationships with families was a goal recognized by many teachers. In a reflection towards the end of the semester, Mitch stated:

In order for our schools to be truly effective in educating our children, educators must take the time to truly get to know their students. They must see students as individuals and appreciate their unique personal interests, talents, preferences, and abilities. (Mitch, week 13 forum)

Realizing the importance of knowing children and families interfaces with teachers’ realization that no one size fits all (See Chapter 6). Most course participants indicated that diversity should be understood not only as racial, cultural, or disability factors but also in as individual differences. Teachers stated the need to get away from their tendency to sort people and generalize certain group characteristics to individuals. It was evident to teachers based on family input that individual family preferences about interactions with school, ways of parenting, or ways of socializing children varied and influenced how satisfied families were with their relationships with teachers. Teachers did realize that personalizing relationships and attending to individual details that made a difference in developing harmonious relationships with families.

Resourcefulness was observed by teachers as influencing; how they provided information about services available in the communities to help families navigate the special education procedures. They also stated that they should be resourceful in their classroom in order to accommodate different families. Chris noted:

As a special ed teacher I need to take the time to make those connections that mean the student believes that I believe in them and treat them like a real person. I need to be the one who emphasizes their strengths and encourages them to try

hard, follow through and be the best that they can be. They have to have the confidence and assertiveness that it takes to maneuver through an educational system that may or may not have their best interests at heart and I should prepare them to gain it.(Chris, week 3 forum)

Two other professional responsibilities mentioned were being resourceful in time management and incorporating family input with their expertise. Teachers pointed to the lack of time that often prevented them from going the extra mile to develop constructive partnerships. However, they also recognized that making time was worth the effort because it would pay off eventually. In her Week 13 Forum discussion, York stated, “Basically, I need to be prepared and more efficient when working with families. I know that their time is precious and so is mine, so to benefit everyone involved, organization is crucial.” Jacie, too, exemplified this sense of responsibility:

You can also be available to them for questions or concerns they may have about their child’s education, care and well-being. I feel as an educator it is your job to know how the family is doing because this affects how the child learns. Being able to talk with the parents and help them will help the child at school as well. (Jacie, week 13 forum)

Being resourceful in terms of time management provided the teachers with the extra time and flexibility that they needed to listen to families’ input and incorporate it in their planning. They realized that giving families extra time before or after case conferences help them understand and absorb the information presented was believed to be important in solving many of the problems that were pointed out in Chapter 6 about the IEP processes. They felt that post-conference support would convey to the families that teachers really cared about the families and were willing to devote time to collaborating with them. Hale stated in her week 3 forum, “We need to make an effort to get to know students and communicate with parents. Regular communication between home and school can help us be better informed.” An observation in Kim’s week 12

family journal about the impact of caring on relationships supports this conviction, “I have observed the email communication and verbal communication regarding Steven. I think the fact that the teachers seem to care about Steven and what he needs, has helped to establish a trusting relationship with the family.”

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, teachers were observed to communicate best with families whose culture most closely resembles the school culture. These families adapt to schools expectations and know how to effectively navigate the system. Teachers realized that the families who do not match the school culture benefit less from the services schools provide. Noting these issues, teachers claimed that it should be teachers’ professional responsibility to ensure equity in service delivery to all families. They had learned that to do so, they needed to be sensitive to the cultural differences among families and find the best ways and means to communicate and collaborate to overcome the barriers cultural differences create. Listening to families and incorporating their input in decision-making was perceived as an important role that professionals could play in overcoming the mismatch between school culture and family culture. Angulo asserted:

As professionals our job is to get to know the family and to try and understand them and support them. If we “look down” on these families and don’t accept them where they are at, then we have put up a huge roadblock to collaboration and working together. None of us like to work with someone who thinks they are better than we are. It’s the same with parents and students. We have to show respect to them like we expect others to give to us. (Angulo, week 14 forum)

It was encouraging to see that teachers perceived facilitating justice and equity as part of their professional role. Yet, their ability to overcome barriers posed by schools not being designed with families of diverse backgrounds in mind depended mostly on their sense of responsibility about achieving social justice and equity. It was encouraging to

discover that many, but not all, had the sense of responsibility which inspired them to work against the grain to enhance the education of their students and include their students' families.

### *Communicating Sincerity and Trustworthiness*

One of the most commonly cited barriers to partnerships by teachers was not having trusting relationships between teachers and families. Teachers came to realize that unless they were open, truthful, and sincere in their communication, families were not going to be receptive to collaboration. Teachers claimed that they witnessed the importance of personalizing relationships in ensuring that families felt teachers were genuinely interested in their children. Unless families felt that teachers had genuine intentions toward their offspring, they would not trust teachers. Lyndsay demonstrated her realization of the importance of building trust with families:

I always had wanted the families to trust my professional opinion and me, but I think the Arch really highlighted what it takes to earn the “keystone” of trust. One cannot simply hope that others trust him/her. There must be careful, deliberate practices along the path of education leading to trust.”(Lyndsay, forum 8)

When asked why they agreed to participate in this Family Project, almost all project families responded that it was because they trusted the teachers who asked for their participation and felt comfortable having them in their homes. Perhaps because of hearing these responses, teachers realized that it was their professional responsibility to build trust with the families especially if they wanted access to the lives of their students. Further, teachers also came to understand that trust was not about only families trusting teachers but teachers trusting families as well. As mentioned in chapter 6, teachers learned that families wanted teachers to understand that “families have good reasons for

doing things the way they do” so their actions should not be interpreted out of context. Many felt that teachers had a general tendency not to trust families’ judgments about education perhaps because they still had the mentality that educational decisions should be made by professionals who were the alleged experts in the field. Michael’s response (Forum 4) sums up the observations made by many teachers, “There are teachers in my school who all feel they are the ‘experts’ and know ‘the best way’ to deal with a child or how to intervene. There are some who have an attitude as if they know better than families or even better than other teachers do. They act as if they know better what a child needs.” As cited earlier, this was particularly true when the cultures of families mismatched school’s culture mistrust was even more intense. As indicated by their early discourses, participant teachers began to verbalize the problems with a biased and untrusting mentality. As Angulo elaborated:

I think that many teachers tend to look at the lower economic groups as not caring about education because “they probably didn’t graduate” from high school or attend college. Teachers may tend to look at kids that come to school somewhat unkempt as being uncared for at home and that parents just aren’t attentive to their child’s needs. It’s an assumption that we have all probably made at one time or another. It’s something we should not assume however. As professionals our job is to get to know the family and to try and understand them and support them. If we “look down” on these families and don’t accept them where they are at, then we have put up a huge roadblock to collaboration and working together. None of us like to work with someone who thinks they are better than we are. It’s the same with parents and students. We have to show respect to them like we expect others to give to us. Being mismatched doesn’t have to create barriers, but most of the time it probably does. (Angulo, forum 4)

This theme of “teachers’ determination to change their attitudes towards families and overcome the general tendencies many teachers in the field tend to have” was related to the next sub-theme of “working against the grain.” Teachers came to realize that change would not happen unless they started to change themselves.



### *Being Ready To Work Against The Grain*

The systems approach to family-school relationships appeared to be still at an emergent level in terms of being fully implemented and accepted by participant teachers. Teachers asserted their opinion that many school systems would not be as receptive to the idea of systems approach due to the time it demanded for application. They also felt that resistance to the systems approach was due to the fact that it went against some established school policies. Therefore, one professional role teachers expressed the desire to take on was based on their new understanding of the necessity to initiate change no matter how much resistance they encountered in their school systems. Heather and Adam's comments echo the views of many teachers on this topic:

Initiating the change is the most important step. Otherwise, people just sit around and talk about how things SHOULD change, but then never do anything about it. Initiating the change can be the hardest part of change. It takes a lot of collaboration to work effectively, and using resources in the community can only help in this situation. (Heather, week 15 forum)

Testimonials were shared from teachers in our class who have recently tried to include families in the creation of the IEP within their case conferences and positive responses and feedback was the result. I expect and hope to involve the parent's of my students in the educational planning with the IEP. It may be an initial hard sell to my principal and other special education staff. However, I think that once they see the positive outcomes of involving our students' parents in this way, they will begin to understand that this is an instrumental practice that will allow parents to feel more directly involved. (Adam, week 16 final reflection)

Teachers realized that misconceptions about how the IEP process should be conducted were due to the culture of their schools. They came to see that certain policies were not created with the best interests of students and families in mind. They complained that many policies were aimed at saving the school money or time, or easing the coordination of services for school personnel. As one asserted with frustration: "This

is not the way it should be! Schools should keep the students' interest higher than the system's!" Many were frustrated at the extent to which school issues were driven by money. They became aware that the motives evident among school personnel influenced teachers' practices and to some extent made them non-responsive to issues because they felt they did not have control over the factors that drive such practices.

The majority of teachers talked about how their school system did not want to hire additional teachers or more highly qualified teachers because they wanted to save money. They also shared how overwhelmed they were due to the size of their caseload and the amount of required paperwork. Many talked about the pressures schools put on them to decrease referrals, limit services required by the IEP, and requiring them to hold IEP meetings during their personal time in order to avoid the need to hire substitutes to cover for them while they are in the meeting. Kari's testimony is an example of those who expressed such concerns when she stated, "The major thing is the fact that the teachers and administrators have different views of what is 'best' for our special education program... The teachers feel like the administration is pushing for more attention on special education, but yet they cut our special education staff."

After reevaluating school circumstances at their schools, teachers realized that the more they complied with unfair treatment (for either teachers and students), the worse the situation would get. Sarah stated, "The longer we keep fighting amongst ourselves within the isolation of our individual schools, the longer it will take to realize that there are overall fundamental problems in the system." Therefore, teachers came to conclusion that they needed to do what was best for their students and change the way they performed some responsibilities in order to create the change that would ensure that the needs of

their students were met. In order to create systems change, they understood that they needed to do things differently even if it might not be received with enthusiasm by their administrators and colleagues. The following comments illustrate their realization:

I think the best way for teachers to advocate for system change is to bridge the partnership between the school and the family. As teachers, we have a tricky job. Teachers need to advocate for parents and protect the schools. I do not know if as teachers we can perform both job so that both parties are happy, but I know we can perform this job so that our student receive the best education possible. Being an advocate may mean pushing for certain things a student need and also include being blunt with parents when they are asking for too much. I do not know if we can actually do both but we must try. (Meca, forum 6)

I do not think that passing blanket legislation and spending millions on all of these initiatives is helping students. As a society we need to be realistic and develop expectations for everyone on their individual levels. (York, week 13 forum)

Just because most of these students will choose not to go on to college, we should not look down upon them, or skimp on their education. In fact, the opposite is true—if it seems likely that our students will not go on to receive college educations, we should work even harder to fill their High School days with as much education and learning as we can, because this may be the very last chance that any of them will have for book learning. (Shonda, week 13 forum)

In the end, many participant teachers were fired up with the idea of the benefits of systems change. Many elaborated the ways to make changes and expressed their desire to try some of these ways. However, intentions and reality do not necessarily merge. It is difficult to determine how many of these teachers will actually follow up on their thoughts and have a real influence on their day to day practices.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation study was to illuminate the impact of teacher education practices in preparing teachers to partner with families. This study aimed at making both practical and scientific contributions to the field by documenting the course content building processes of a curriculum specifically designed to prepare teachers in family-professional partnerships. As stated in Chapter 1, my review of relevant literature revealed the following gaps in research with regard to teacher preparation in family-professional partnerships: (1) a lack of conception of what family-professional partnerships mean; (2) an ambiguity about what is to be addressed in personnel preparation programs and how to address such competencies to facilitate and support these partnerships; and (3) a lack of comprehensive research evaluating the impact of different preparation models on professionals. Addressing these gaps was needed in order to establish a reliable knowledge base about effective ways to prepare teachers for family-professional partnerships. With this study, therefore, I set out to contribute to the literature base by documenting the content building and delivery of the model studied; identifying issues regarding the design, implementation, and outcomes of the model; and producing practical information that might help in building the knowledge base with regard to teacher preparation for family-professional partnerships.

The results of this study indicate that the gaps identified in research were addressed in the following ways: 1. By examining the thought processes of participant teachers, the study derived a scheme of how “family-professional partnerships” were understood by teachers, and documented how such an understanding could be achieved

by deliberately designed activities and hands-on experiences in teacher education. 2. This research facilitated the emergence of a framework for knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes that need to be addressed in teacher education in order to prepare teachers for family-professional partnership. 3. The study generated practical knowledge about the design, delivery, and content of a curriculum aimed at preparing teachers to establish and maintain partnerships with families of their students. 4. Finally, the study provided the methodological model that could be used to guide future research in studying the impact of teacher preparation programs. In this chapter, I present a summary of the study's findings and report on how the design of the study made it possible for this research to reach its goals in addressing the gaps found in the literature.

### *Summary of the Findings*

This dissertation study corroborated the idea that using a well-established conceptual framework- such as Systems Theory- to guide the design and implementation of a curriculum could effectively produce attitudinal change. By deliberately using conventional/ online/ hands-on activities, reflection, and journaling teachers could be lead to a new understanding of family-professional partnerships. Teachers could accumulate the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to put partnerships with families into practice by developing a positive professional attitude towards working with families of their students.

In Chapter 5, findings concerning teachers' ability to reach a deeper understanding of others by putting an effort into studying their own personalities and the influences of their upbringing on shaping their current characters were presented. This chapter provided evidence that the majority of teachers realized the influence their white,

middle-class, Christian backgrounds had on their views and on the way they responded in social interactions. The study indicated that awareness of biases, preconceptions, and judgmental attitudes was fundamental in enabling teachers to reach a better understanding of others' perspectives. It became evident that to help teachers realize the nature of their perspectives, teacher education should facilitate teachers' effective use of reflection, critical thinking, and problem solving strategies. In this chapter, I documented a rare practice in teacher education which was to have teachers review their personal and professional development from a life span perspective - starting from the time their personality was shaped in their families of origin until present time. This chapter provided a model for how the systems approach could be taught to teachers as best practice in enabling them to form linkages between their prior and current experiences. Of interest to this discussion is the literature that mentions the conditions under which teacher learning can take place. Freeman and Richards (1996, p.340) state that teachers' learning and change depend on their individual characteristics and prior experiences, which shape their view of others and their professional responsibilities. They further assert that learning and change could happen only if the input is valued and salient to the individual and it is congruent with, and interpretable within, teachers' own world of thought and actions. Comparable with these assertions, this study documented the ways our curriculum made the course input accessible to teachers. The findings of this study indicate that exposing teachers to the information in the context of their upbringing, and teaching them how to use critical thinking and reflection as tools to reevaluate their practice created awareness of the information presented to them, and helped them form favorable attitudes towards information about families because they were able to relate to

the information to their own circumstances. Teachers were able to apply the information about families to their own lives via class activities such as the Family Project. Therefore, the curriculum not only taught theory but it made the theory come alive in practice. This seemed to have minimized the gap between theory and practice and provided the teachers with the needed support from peers and instructors as they practiced new strategies. The study also indicated that the design and implementation of the curriculum, created the impetus for practicing teachers to adopt more family centered practices. Sometimes teachers experienced feelings of discomfort due to a clash between their pre-existing values and the information presented. Such clashes were observed especially in discussions of topics such as alternative life styles, family functionality, cultural diversity, and the value of expertise in educational decision making. Discomfort was the vehicle that stimulated teachers to reevaluate, and change their views and practices.

Chapter 6, detail how teachers developed a new understanding about families and realized new ways of working with them. These findings revealed that the majority of teachers developed an understanding far beyond the traditional school involvement practices. They came to understand that it is not solely the school/professional agenda that matters but rather that families' needs and contributions matter as well. It became clear to participating teachers that partnering with families require a balancing act between schools and families in which both partners negotiate recognition, power, mutual understanding, and respect. The importance of personalizing relationships for partnerships to happen was another finding extracted from participant teachers' discourse.

Results presented in Chapter 7, highlight what teachers perceived as their professional roles in their interactions with families. These could easily be converted to a set of skills and attitudes needed by teachers to practice family-professional partnerships. Such skills and dispositions might be targeted in any teacher education program that seeks to prepare its teachers for family-professional partnerships. The skills cited in Chapter 7 included: communication skills (e.g., listening, speaking, note taking, initiating conversation, and using different modes of communication), time management skills, skills related to finding and utilizing resources, coordination skills, and problem solving skills. Disposition related traits addressed in this chapter included: ability and willingness to recognize personal limitations and take action to overcome such limitations, openness, trust, self-criticism or self-reflection that enables them to identify judgmental attitudes and have a positive outlook on working with families as equal partners rather than assuming professional superiority in educational matters.

In the next section, how the study's design enabled the researcher to reach these goals as well as their implications for future research will be discussed.

### *Naturalistic Inquiry and Teacher Learning*

As indicated in Chapter 3, naturalistic and hermeneutic research methods were selected in order to capture teachers' thinking and mental processes, and trace and document the teaching and learning effects of this curriculum (Brantlinger et al, 2005). It has been well established in the literature that, contrary to the levels of traditional Stage Theory, teacher learning and professional identity development does not occur in linear stages (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Britzman & Greene 1991; Day, Stobart, Sammons, Kington, Gu, Smees, and Mujtaba, 2006; Day & Kington, 2008) It is also known that



teachers respond to course materials and experiences distinctively due to their unique personalities and prior experiences. It would be impossible to reduce teacher experiences to a limited number of variables that could be studied in a linear fashion. Therefore, when considering research methodologies, it did not seem relevant use research methods based on quantitative assumptions about generalization. Qualitative methods enabled me to focus on the voices of each teacher who participated in this study and also to analyze what was not voiced in their discourse that could only be detected by conjecturing about implicit meanings. Assessing implicit meanings in teachers' narratives, I believe, provided valuable insights into the complexities of teachers' thought processes and enabled me to evaluate the impact of course activities to assess whether real change occurred. Teacher learning and professional identity development are complex phenomena. With this solid qualitative research design, these study results provide a sound foundation for future research into the complexities of teacher learning and professional identity development, as well as the intricacies of the role teacher education plays in this developmental process.

While generalization is not the goal of a qualitative researcher (Brantlinger et al., 2005), there is still always an attempt to assert implications, as I have done, beyond the scope of the case itself. Even though the intent of the study was not to generalize the findings to the efforts of other institutions that seek to prepare teachers for partnering with families, it must be noted that such generalizations cannot be made for national or international teacher preparation efforts for two reasons: 1. Participants studied mostly came from the same geographical region and had similar cultural backgrounds, hence are not representative of teachers nationwide. This limitation was due to the nature and

location of the institution where the study was conducted. Being a Midwestern public institution, IUB mainly draws its student body from Indiana and surrounding Midwestern states in which diversity is limited. 2. Cultural diversity among families with whom teachers interacted for their Family Projects was minimal. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, family background influences the nature and content of their interactions with schools and teachers. Therefore, home-school interactions of teachers across the nation will vary depending on the backgrounds of families and teachers. To be able to study variations in the nature and content of the interactions of families from diverse backgrounds with teachers, further research needs to be conducted.

As noted in Chapters 5 and 6, one limitation of this study could be the fact that I mostly relied on self-reported data from my participants and that data collection did happen in a course environment which may have influenced the responses/narratives of teachers to the curriculum which was the main source of data. In many instances, teachers seemed eager to please the instructors, and were careful not to sound politically incorrect in their responses, hence their real thoughts may not be explicitly reflected in their responses. However, the study's credibility was increased by drawing on a variety of data sources. Teachers' written and verbal accounts of their thinking were gathered via observation, interviews with key participants, artifacts accumulated in online environment, and course evaluation data. The accumulation of data not only through self-reported accounts but also using observation and interviews conducted with family co-instructors, some teachers, and some project families enabled me to check the accuracy of my understanding of the data after my initial readings and the consistency between teachers' written and verbal accounts. I attended and took notes of my observations at all

planning meetings and in face to face meetings throughout the course. This enabled me to hear what participants said besides what they wrote. The interviews I conducted with randomly selected key participants (teachers, family members, and family member co-instructors) who agreed to be interviewed during and after the course gave me an opportunity to elucidate my understanding of the data from my initial readings and ask clarifying questions to address the possible influence of classroom expectations on the reports/narratives of teachers. This layered approach seemed to some extent to help overcome the limitations mentioned above. However, this still did not ensure the sustainability of teacher change or the impact of the curriculum after the course ended. Having limited my data collection to a semester limited my ability to discern whether teachers sustained the practice of changes they reported. A longitudinal design in which teachers' interactions with families could be observed after they leave the program is warranted.

Another strategy I used to increase the reliability of my findings was having a peer debriefer. After the course ended and my initial reading of the data finished, a doctoral student with many years experience teaching at the K-12 and higher education levels and who was knowledgeable about the research methodology in use was hired to do the readings of the data with the researcher. The researcher and the peer each took copies of the same chunk of data, read them separately; color coded the emergent themes, and wrote a summary paragraph for each theme based on their understanding of the data. Finally, the researcher and debriefer met once a week to discuss and compare their emergent themes. The coding of the data and the emergent themes were discussed. In many cases this process required merging themes, elaborating on interpretations, or

reducing interpretations when conclusive evidence spotted in the data. This process continued until all the data sets were read and the coded data became ready for final analysis. It must be noted however, that employing peer debriefing was not used to overcome subjectivity but rather to enable me as a researcher to look at the phenomena studied from multiple perspectives. My analysis of my data was guided with the principles of qualitative research noted in the literature (Brantlinger, 1997; Brantlinger 1999; Brantlinger et al., 2005); I took an “emic (insider to the phenomenon) perspective” as a former teacher and teacher educator who have gone and is still going through a professional identity development with the awareness of the influence my background have on this development, I believed that “interpretation is a necessary stage of all qualitative work”, and that my interpretations as a researcher should not be viewed as a problem that interferes with the validity of my research. Brantlinger (1999) describes how our professional gaze is actually enhanced by our moral grounding and our personal lens. Hence, placing the utmost importance on basing my interpretations on the evidence in the data, I also perceived the task of documenting my understanding of the data as my responsibility as a qualitative researcher. The method in which data sets were first analyzed separately enabled a cross-comparison between sets. This holistic approach proved to be effective in pinpointing unpredicted fluctuations in the narratives of teachers, and hence validated the interpretations made. This approach enabled me to compress the data by merging or collapsing themes into the categories reported in the results chapters.

The fact that the analytical framework had three discrete developmental phases may convey the wrong message to the readers. The intent in using such a framework was

solely for the purpose of addressing the three major areas in which teachers constructed new understandings from their encounters with course content, course activities, and hands-on experiences with families. It was not to convey that teachers go through each developmental stage in isolation from the other stages or in a linear progression. As mentioned earlier in this chapter recent research (Day, Stobart, Sammons, Kington, Gu, Smees, and Mujtaba, 2006; Day & Kington, 2008) established that teacher learning and professional identity development does not happen in linearity as the earlier traditional “Stage Theory” suggested. As I forced my emergent themes under the three distinctive developmental categories my framework suggested, I faced considerable overlap among categories due to the fact that teachers went through these stages simultaneously and the stages were highly interrelated. For example, for some teachers “self realization” was achieved in the first few weeks in the course, whereas for other it was achieved by the end of the course or not at all. Also, “understanding families” and “re-conceptualization of professional roles” was highly dependent on the achievement of the “self realization” stage, which made it impossible to look at these three stages in isolation from each other. Therefore, analysis of this trend made me realize that my model could be misinterpreted as if teachers were expected to go through these developmental stages in linearity and in isolation from each other. One of the most important assumptions this curriculum made was that teachers bring different experiences and skill levels to teacher education and that their learning experiences and professional identity development will vary in pace and quality.

Finally, it should be noted that the curriculum development process of the studied program was based on systematic research. This design based on accumulated

knowledge could be considered a strength of this model of course development. The program did not prematurely rely on methodologies presented in the literature but rather based its development on the study and understanding of its home-grown program's long history in practice, the opinions of stakeholders involved in the program, and the decisions made that brought the curriculum to its current state. The content building and development process of this curriculum could be summarized with the developmental model used by Reeves (2000) as illustrated in the figure below.

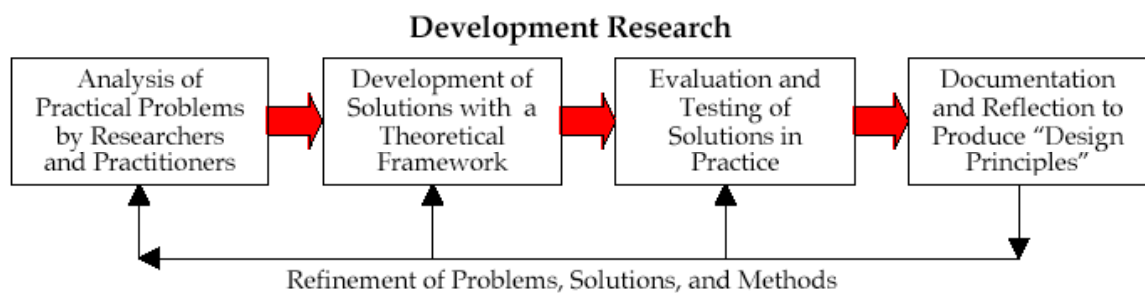


Figure 2: Development research (Reeves, 2000)

The preliminary 2003 study provided information for refining the curriculum. Results from this collaborative study were equivalent to the first phase in the Figure 1 model. Systems Theory was adopted as the framework for developing solutions to how partnerships are viewed and understood (see second phase of the Figure 2 model). Data collection and analysis of the collected data was the evaluation of the impact our new design/solutions had (see the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of Figure 2). And the dissertation report concludes as the final phase of producing design principles for IUB and similar family-professional partnership components of teacher education programs. The refinement of the curriculum was - and continues to be - an integral part of course design and revision. This iterative process creates a cycle with checks and balances in place. The study and refinement of

the curriculum never was a one shot approach but rather was a continuous process that happened during each subsequent offering of the course. At this point, the curriculum has reached a level in which the content related to teacher skills, competencies, and dispositions is well established. In the following section, recommendations based on the findings of this dissertation study will be made to improve this model and provide guidance to similar teacher education programs.

#### *Recommendations for Future Practice in Teacher Education*

Referring back to the question of how the refinements made to this curriculum in 2005 helped overcome the deficits identified in the 2003 study, this research achieved its purpose of documenting change in teachers' skills and attitudes and also by pinpointing what the curriculum was not be able to achieve in terms of targeted areas of concern.

The changes proved to have brought more structure to the experiences of teachers as they reported in their final reflections and the evaluation of the course. Teachers stated that the guidelines provided for each activity made it easier for them to execute the task and reach the intended goals. Research indicates that precise learning goals provide a clear focus for instruction and communicating the goals to the learner improves learning outcomes (Stiggins, 2005.) Similar comments about the positive outcomes of this structure were made by family members (both co-instructor family members and project family members who were interviewed). This structure also brought a mutual understanding of what family-professional partnerships mean in practice. Therefore, it could be concluded that deliberate course organization has merits for improving future practices in teacher education.

Second, the addition of more vignettes, the extension of time spent with families through the Family Project, and the inclusion of family members as co-instructors in the course proved to have constructive impact on the reflective thought processes of teachers. These course changes provided teachers with opportunities and time to get to know families through interaction and observation and use reflective skills longer to become more proficient in this process. The extensive reflection required seemed to have helped teachers improve their analytical skills and their use of these skills in overcoming their preconceived notions about families. They were mostly able to shed their negative attitudes toward working with families (as documented in Chapter 6).

The Family Project proved to be one of the most effective components of the curriculum. This suggests that such a project should be an integral part of any program aimed at preparing teachers in family-professional partnerships. The following recommendations could be made based on the findings of this study for the restructuring of the project design in order to address the issues remained unresolved or the parts that did not work:

First, project family selection could be made more structured rather than being left to teachers' choice. Some teachers communicated to me in our conversations that they did not really have a complex experience in which they were exposed to different issues because they selected a convenient family with whom they had been interacting rather than a family that would have presented more challenges. For teachers to be prepared to interact with all students' families, they should be exposed to families who are culturally different, or are from different social backgrounds. They should be exposed to families experiencing adversity dealing with schools. In addition, the severity of the



child's disability in terms of intensity of need should be considered. As documented in Chapter 4, the project family selection was a discussion topic during the restructuring process. Although the selection of challenging families was considered important, for programmatic reasons, the consensus was that "family selection should be left to students and they should not be forced to do the project with a family of one of their students." The rationale behind this decision was that some teachers may not be as ready for a leap outside their comfort zone. This decision clearly influenced the outcomes of the project. Therefore, in future design considerations the suitability of this decision should be reassessed.

Second, based on the needs expressed by teachers in their final evaluation of the course, the first couple weeks of the project could be dedicated to decision making processes with regard to family selection, things to consider when approaching families, and review is needed communication skills. Teachers could be directed to identify the families of their class who have not been able to establish any relationships with the teacher or school and give the priority to the families and students who could most benefit from such an experience.

Finally, based on the comments received from participant teachers at the end of the class, it was evident that teachers felt the time consuming practicum attached was too demanding for a three credit hour course. Therefore, future considerations could be to require that as attaching practicum be second course with extra credit hours granted towards their degrees. Clearly, most teacher education programs are already packed with course requirements, so for some programs this would be impossible. However, the practicum could be added as one credit hour course through which teachers could keep in

touch with the class members and the instructor via online instruction to constantly reflect on what happens in their field work and whether their strategies work or not. As I argued earlier, there is a need to observe teachers on the job as they put what they learn about family-professional partnerships into practice. Teachers could be observed in a required interaction (e.g., how they partner with families in an IEP meeting, how they partner with them when a behavioral or academic problem arises). This could be a program requirement rather than a course requirement. This study indicate that such reconsiderations would greatly enhance the Family Project practicum experience and would make it less stressful for practicing teachers who have little time to spare. It must be noted however, these considerations should be informed by factors specific to institutional context and the needs of its clients (teachers).

My findings confirm that teachers need to understand families better and they can learn through a course designed for that purpose. Results indicated that teachers can learn to understand “self” and the impact of their personality on their professional practices through guided analytic thought and reflection. These reflective processes are best described as “Practical Theorizing” (Usher & Bryant, 1989). This means that teachers become critically aware of the informally developed theories that guide their practices. This study demonstrates that self reflection skills do not come automatically to all teachers. Findings indicate that not all teachers know how to reflect on their observations, actions, and interactions from a professional stand. It point to the need for teacher education to develop a systematic process to prepare teachers in reflective skills. For example, a checklist of what teachers need to be aware of as they reflect could be prepared. Teachers could be asked to use this checklist as they reflect until they become

proficient in using the procedures. Further, a procedure to deal with their ability to differentiate between professional perspective and personal perspective could be developed, taught, and modeled for teachers so they could act professionally in situations. This procedure would ensure that student's best interests are kept as priority rather than teachers' personal agenda taking precedence.

An area that was identified as problematic in the 2003 preliminary study and was targeted with the changes made to the 2005 curriculum was the diversity issue. Teachers' lack of understanding and responsiveness to diversity seemed to create a barrier to family-professional partnerships. Therefore, the changes made to the curriculum did target the skills and dispositions of teachers in terms of understanding diversity and accounting for it in their practices. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the fact that teachers mostly came from white, middle-class, Christian backgrounds may not be something that teacher education could have control over in the short run. However, the careful design of the activities and content of the course seemed to spark more thought and discussion about diversity throughout the course. One aspect that could have been addressed better, however, was the diversity of project families which could have ensured the interactions of teachers with diverse families to prepare them to feel more comfortable interacting with families of diverse backgrounds. The curriculum remained short in addressing this issue due to circumstances noted in Chapter 4.

Another aspect of diversity that surfaced in this study as in need of being addressed was religious background and its implications for professional practice. The need to address religious diversity issues were not detected in the 2003 preliminary study. Historically, religious issues have not been mentioned in the professional teacher

education literature. This could be in part due to the fact that generally teachers, instructors, and even practicum families have similar religious backgrounds. Therefore, lack of opportunities for conflict cause failure in sparking discussion with regard to this issue. Findings of this study indicate that religious background has a great impact on teachers' identity and their professional practice. Therefore, religious diversity issues warrant creating structured reflective activities, and the inclusion of topics about religion subcultures in the course. Such changes would help teachers realize that their ethical reasoning and definitions of moral behavior are products of their background and their ways of perceiving the world may not necessarily interface with the perspectives of their students and their families. If they learn that the religious views of families views of families and students are different from theirs teachers could become deliberate and non-doctrinating in their interactions with families from diverse religious backgrounds. To develop effective curriculum components for addressing religious diversity, further research to understand the influence of religious cultures on teachers' professional identity should be conducted.

A strength of the studied curriculum that should be maintained in any teacher education program is its focus on the experiences teachers bring into teacher education. Wang and O'Dell (2002) point to the fact that little attention has been given to the assumptions teachers bring into teacher education. With its systems approach and life span perspective, this curriculum seemed to have filled this gap by accounting for these experiences and assumptions through a wide range of opportunities designed to help teachers become aware of their own assumptions. Further, teachers were provided with

the needed tools (skills and methods) in order to take action and overcome their limiting assumptions, negative attitudes, and/or preconceived notions (see Chapter 5).

Another recommendation can be made based on the findings of this study is concerns the delivery method of the course. Considering that this curriculum is created around “relationships,” which frequently required the use of analytical and critical thinking skills, the delivery format of the course which largely relied on online methods should be questioned. The format offered such advantages such as the ability to interact with teachers over a wide geographical area, being convenient time-wise for practicing teachers, providing the advantage of documenting responses in text for future reference throughout the course. Yet, online delivery still posed barriers. It did not allow immediate responses to the issues presented. A beneficial course input was observed when the course instructors or family member instructors directly responded to specific students to make them ponder about how they responded and the implications their responses. Teachers were likely to reflect and express similar attitudes during scaffolding from the instructors and family member co-instructors. When they did not get direct responses from instructors, peers, or family members, they did not show a change in perspective. The online format seemed to disrupt the continuum of constant feedback and scaffolding aimed at achieving intended outcomes. Although the distribution of responses from family members was equal for each teacher, family responses were limited to only 4 per teacher throughout the semester due to the time they require families to write responses. If the course was delivered in a conventional face-to-face format then teachers would have gotten the chance to speak more and receive more immediate feedback from instructors/family members or responses to their questions. The online format saved time

for all involved in terms of eliminating commute and the scheduling time, but it also consumed time in requiring course participants to communicate everything in writing. There was an attempt to moderate these positive and negative sides of this delivery format by increasing the number of face-to-face meetings to four times instead of two times in the semester which appeared to help. These issues should be considered in the future design of courses based on the contextual needs of the program and the circumstances of its clients.

### *A Final Word*

The framework proposed in this dissertation articulates an approach that extends the role of teacher education to encompass examination of prior experiences and attitudes teachers bring into teacher education as part of their professional identity development. The model also suggests the use of a Systems Approach to help teachers build a new understanding of the influence their personal backgrounds have on their professional identities and to help them develop the ability to translate new understandings to their practice while partnering with families. This study indicates that the K548 Families, School, and Society course achieved its goal in helping teachers synthesize the new knowledge and skills they gained in their training with prior personal experiences in order to develop the dispositions and positive attitudes needed to be effective in their practice.

The study documented that the course studied had a reasonable structure because it was effective in achieving its overall goals of preparing teachers to partner with families. Overall, it could be concluded that the comprehensive course curriculum with Family Systems Theory component as a solid conceptual framework, provided the much

needed direction in teacher preparation and the solid information base that could be used by others in the search for improvement of similar programs. The study facilitated the emergence of a conceptual framework related to knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for the preparation of teachers in partnering with families. However, it also must be noted that some diversity issues that could be addressed within the design of the curriculum remain unresolved. In addition, the proficiency level in practical theorizing and reflection skills remain unclear. Further, teachers' ability to transfer what they learn to practice was a part of this study and I believe it should be examined in the future research.

This study showed me that high success rate is possible in teacher education with well designed programs. However, the few teachers that did not fully reach the goals set for this training made me question how many more are slipping through many more programs across the county and made me ponder about the magnitude of the problem that we may be facing due to inadequate training of teachers not only in the area of family-professional partnerships but in all other areas.

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APPENDIX A

INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
BLOOMINGTON CAMPUS COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF  
HUMAN SUBJECTS

DOCUMENTATION OF REVIEW AND APPROVAL

of

Research Project Utilizing Human Subjects

Study # ~~05-10271~~

TITLE OF PROJECT: Preparing Teachers for Partnering with Families: Examining the  
Impact of a Specifically Designed Curriculum on Professionals

PROJECT DURATION - START DATE Sept 2005  
Dec 2006

END DATE

PRIN. INVESTIGATOR Suad Sakalli Gumus  
SCHOOL/DEPT SoE/C&I

ADDRESS 201 N.Rose Ave. Bloomington,IN E-MAIL [ssakalli@indiana.edu](mailto:ssakalli@indiana.edu)  
PHONE (812) 339 6042

RANK: Faculty Res. Scientist Post-Doc Staff Student: undergrad masters —  
PhD/EdD X

If PI's rank is OTHER than faculty, name of faculty overseeing the research  
(SPONSOR) Ellen Brantlinger, PhD.

SPONSOR'S E-MAIL & CAMPUS ADDRESS brantlin@indiana.edu WW Wright  
3234 PHONE (812) 332-8555

FUNDING AGENCY ~~Daisy-Jones Fellowship (for a \$1000)~~ APPL. \_\_\_\_\_  
DEADLINE N/A

AGENCY PROJECT # \_\_\_\_\_ New \_\_\_\_\_ Continuation \_\_\_\_\_

*As the principal investigator, my signature testifies that I pledge to conform to the following:*

As one engaged in investigation utilizing human subjects, I acknowledge the rights and welfare of the human subject involved.

I acknowledge my responsibility as an investigator to secure the informed consent of the subject by explaining the procedures, in so far as possible, and by describing the risks as weighed against the potential benefits of the investigation.

I assure the Committee that all procedures performed under the project will be conducted in accordance with those Federal regulations and University policies which govern research involving human subjects. **Any deviation from the project (e.g., change in principal investigator, research methodology, subject recruitment procedures, etc.) will be submitted to the Committee in the form of an amendment for its approval prior to implementation.**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

~~Suad Sakalli Gumus~~ \_\_\_\_\_

(typed/printed name)

(signature)

(date)

As the faculty sponsor, my signature testifies that I have reviewed this application and that I will oversee the research in its entirety, through the termination report.

FACULTY SPONSOR:

Ellen Brantlinger

---

(typed/printed name)

(signature)

(date)

\*\*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*

### CAMPUS LEVEL REVIEW

This protocol for the use of human subjects has been reviewed and approved by the  
Indiana

University/Bloomington Campus Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.

☒ Exempt Review ¶#,      Exempt ¶#      with  
signed/documentation of consent,

\_\_\_\_\_

Expedited Review,      Full Review,      Not Approved,  
Withdrawn

\_\_\_\_\_

---

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson/Agent IUB Committee

Date

logged in ts 7/26/05 approval logged 9/9/05 copy to PI 9/9/05 notice to  
SOE rank code EFI-3 test: PI 9/11/02 sponsor  
8/5/02 co-PI

6/02;www;msw

-3-



## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST - ADDENDUM TO APPLICATION PACKET**

**Effective 10/31/00**

**Please provide the following information as the last section of your research statement, regardless of the source of funding for the proposed research or the level of review:**

1. Does anyone who will participate in the design, conduct, or reporting of the proposed research have a “significant financial interest,” as defined in the *University’s Statement on Compliance with State Law on Conflicts of Interest and Federal Law on Financial Conflicts of Interest in Research*, {<http://www.indiana.edu/~deanfac/acadhbkc/appnunidiv/condit.html#conflict>} that is related to the subject matter of the research? If so, please describe the interest(s) **NO (should I give gift cards for their participatio, at least for taking the time to journal???)**
2. If the answer to (i) is yes, would that interest reasonably appear to directly and significantly affect, or be affected by, the design, conduct, or reporting of the proposed research? Please explain why or why not. For guidance on what types of interests may raise potential conflicts issues, please refer to the above Statement on Compliance, and the *Bloomington Procedures for Disclosure and Review of Financial Interests in Compliance With the Indiana University Statement on Compliance with State Law on Conflicts of Interest and Federal Law on Financial Conflicts of Interest in Research*, Appendix B. {<http://www.indiana.edu/~resrisk/conflict.html>}
3. If the answer to (ii) is yes, and the proposed research is funded with federal funds either directly or with “pass-through” funds, has this significant financial interest already been disclosed through a conflicts of interest disclosure form? If so, please append to this application a copy of the disclosure form and any other information indicating when and by whom the disclosure was reviewed, whether or not a conflict was identified, and if a conflict was identified, any steps taken to avoid, manage, resolve, and (where applicable under federal law) report that conflict. If a conflicts management plan was entered into, please attach a copy of that plan.

**If a potential conflict of interest related to the proposed research is identified, based on external financial interests of the person(s) designing, conducting, or reporting the research, the Committee will work with the investigator(s) to develop**

**appropriate language for the Informed Consent Statement or Study Information Sheet addressing the potential conflict.**

Below are examples of conflicts of interests in hypothetical situations where human subjects are involved. They may also raise general conflict of interest questions which would be handled pursuant to the campus procedures on conflicts of interests.

X has a grant to conduct trials of a new hearing aid. The year before, X who designed the new hearing aid licensed the product to Clear as a Bell, Inc. In return, X received a 10% share of the Company. X has a conflict of interest: His financial interest in the business that makes the product may bias his research into its effectiveness. The conflict must be disclosed to the IRB, which may decide that X's conflict be disclosed to the subjects in the informed consent, and will need to consider whether or not any further conflicts management may be required.

- X, a faculty member at the School of Education, sets up a corporation to do educational testing of children with learning disorders. X is president of the corporation and owns 80% of the shares of the company. X had devised a new instrument and wishes to test its validity. Her protocol to the IRB states X will test children in a number of schools in the state. If the test proves to be effective, X intends to license use of the test to her corporation. X has conflict of interest. Her financial interest is significant. The IRB needs to know of the conflict so that it can determine whether or not the subjects (the children and the parents) need to be informed of the conflict of interest, and how to best monitor the conflict.

**X is a faculty member at HPER. X has developed a plan of exercise for obese adults. X's plan is set forth in his book on exercise. X has human subjects approval to run an exercise clinic for both therapeutic and research purposes. X requires participants to buy X's book and video-tape on exercise. X has a conflict of interest which needs to be disclosed to and evaluated by the IRB BLOOMINGTON CAMPUS COMMITTEE for the PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS**

## **EXEMPT RESEARCH CHECKLIST**

**DIRECTIONS:** This form is to be completed and submitted to the Committee *only* when the investigator plans a research project which, in the investigator's judgment, is exempt from expedited or full Committee review. Even Exempt studies require at least one member or Agent of the Committee to review it. *Research activities are exempt from regulations for the protection of human research subjects when the **only** involvement of human subjects falls within one or more of the categories below.*

**STUDIES INVOLVING PRISONERS, FETUSES, OR PREGNANT WOMEN as subjects, OR involving HUMAN IN VITRO FERTILIZATION WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AS EXEMPT FROM COMMITTEE REVIEW.**

STUDIES INVOLVING **MINORS** in categories 1, 3, 4, 5, & 6 **WILL** BE ACCEPTED AS EXEMPT FROM COMMITTEE REVIEW. Researchers with category 2 studies involving **MINORS** should call the Committee office, 855-3067, for help in determining the type of review required.

If you are doing research in Indiana public schools, or your research is funded by the US Department of Education, and minors are involved, certain additional restrictions apply. Contact the Committee office, 855-3067, for further information.

**Circle the appropriate category #s that apply to your research project & underline, or highlight, the specific section within the category:**



1. Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of, or the comparison among, instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, **unless**: (i) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that the human subject can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; **and** (ii) any disclosure of the human subject's responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subject's financial standing, employability, or reputation.
3. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph 2, **if**: (i) The human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; **or** (ii) federal statutes(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.
4. Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subject.

5. Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of federal department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) Public benefit or service programs (e.g., social security, welfare, etc.); (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.
6. Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives are consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

**BE SURE YOU HAVE CIRCLED AT LEAST ONE ITEM THAT APPLIES TO YOUR PROJECT AND UNDERLINED THE SPECIFIC SECTION WITHIN THE ITEM.**

## **BLOOMINGTON CAMPUS COMMITTEE for the PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS**

### **EXEMPT RESEARCH STATEMENT**

**Use type size no smaller than ARIAL 11 point.**

If additional space for responses is desired, this document may be retyped onto plain paper

Maintaining the identical order and exact question wording while adding extra space where needed.

- A. long? If student research, indicate whether for a course, a thesis, dissertation, or independent research. If the study is only for a course, please review the Student Research Policy to ascertain if this project requires HSC review. For use of existing data provide a description of the data to be used.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of a course (K548) with a family practicum attached to it (planned contact) on the perspectives of teachers and families with regard to family-professional partnerships. This study will attempt to explore whether the involvement of the participants in the course has affected their attitudes and whether this method of preparing teachers to partner with families is effective. The primary investigator will conduct a survey with all K548 participants and families involved in the Family Project, one-on-one interviews with the study participants, observations of interactions among participating families and teachers, and review the weekly journals kept by participants for her dissertation.

- B. Describe the process by which subjects will be recruited/selected, how many (or estimate) will be involved, and any benefits to the subjects. In the event of monetary gain, include all payment arrangements. If merchandise or service is given, indicate the value. If class credit will be given, list the amount and the value as it relates to the total points needed for an A. Describe other ways to earn the same amount. Tell how much payment/credit will be given if the subject withdraws prior to completion of the study. (See policy at <http://www.indiana.edu/~resrisk/compensation.html>) If minors are used, indicate the approximate age range. If only using male or female subjects, explain why. Disclose any relationship between researcher and subjects, such as: teacher/student; superintendent/principal/teacher; employer/employee. (See Students as Subjects section in the Policy Manual.) For use of existing data, provide the number of records to be used.

Subjects who are involved in the family course (K548) at IUB during Fall 2005 will be invited to participate in the study at the beginning of the course in class(teachers

and co-instructor family members) and via mail (families involved in the Family Project). Three to four teachers, family members involved in these teachers' Family Project, and co-instructor family members will be recruited for the study. There will be no monetary gain, class credit, merchandise or services given for participation in this project. No minors will be used. There is no relationship other than researcher-participant relationship between the subjects and the researchers.

- C. Where will this study be conducted? If done during regular class time, what will non-participants do? How much time will be required of the subjects? If using questionnaires, how will they be distributed and collected? Describe methods for preserving confidentiality. How will data be recorded and stored, with or without identifiers? If identifiers are used describe the type: names, job titles, number code, etc. How long are the identifiers kept? If coding system is used, is there a link back to the subject's ID? If yes, where is the code list stored in relation to data, and when is the code list destroyed? How will reports be written, in aggregate terms or will individual responses be described? Will subjects be identified in reports (see item 5 on page 10)? For use of existing data tell whether identifiers are still attached to the data.

The study will be conducted across the state of Indiana at various schools where participating teachers are working and at various places that are convenient for participating families. Interviews will be conducted during a time that is convenient for the participants. Interviews will last approximately an hour. At least two interviews will be conducted with each participant and, if needed, participants will be contacted for clarification or additional questions via e-mail or phone. Interviews will be tape-recorded. The tapes will be destroyed by December 2007.

The researcher also will conduct observations in the field. The length of the observations will vary based on the observed event and the convenience of the participants

Observations will not interrupt the flow of the dealings. Filed notes will be taken during observations. Notes will be about how teachers and families communicate with each other, reach decisions regarding the student with special needs, and plan for future action. These observations, based on the type of event observed, will last for 15- 60 minutes.

Pseudonyms will be used in all written data and when data from the audiotapes have been transformed into written text to protect each participant's identity. The tapes will be destroyed by December 2007.

- D. Coinvestigators, not listed or signing on page 3, are to be listed here and should sign here, pledging to conform to the statements on page 3. **Please provide the person's name & e-mail address.**

INDIANA UNIVERSITY - BLOOMINGTON

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Preparing Teachers for Partnering with Families: Examining the Impact of a Specifically  
Designed Curriculum on Professionals

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “Preparing Teachers for Partnering with Families: Examining Changes in Teacher and Family Perspectives After Planned Contact.” The purpose of this study is to explore whether change in family and teacher perspectives occur after being involved in a course (K548) that is designed to involve families in every aspect of education including teacher education, encounter teachers with families through a family practicum project, and help both sides gain a better understanding of what partnership means and how they can build a productive, healthy partnership.

**INFORMATION**

All teachers and families involved in K548 class are invited to participate in this study by filling a pre and post survey that will approximately take 10 to 15 minutes each. Teachers who choose to do their Family project with their own students’ families and involved families are invited to participate as key participants from whom in depth data will be collected through pre and post interviews that will approximately last one hour each. If needed key participants will be contacted for clarification or additional questions via e-mail or phone. The interviews will seek information to analyze the perspectives of participants on family-professional partnerships and will explore if any change happened after their involvement in the course. Interviews will be audio taped and the tapes will be destroyed by December 2007. Key family member participants will also be asked to journal once a week about an incidence with their child’s teacher. K548 products also will be analyzed. Field observations will be conducted in a time convenient for the family and the teacher. Observations will not interrupt the flow of dealings observed, notes will be taken and the observation will last for 15- 60 minutes.

At least six key participants will be sought(3 teachers and 3 family members) in addition to co-instructors family members who volunteer to be interviewed.



## **BENEFITS**

This study will contribute to the research body by examining the change in teacher and family perspectives with regard to family-professional partnerships after planned contact.

The findings will help gain a clear picture of how family-professional partnership is understood by families and teachers, how these understanding affect the practices, and the impact of a course in family-professional partnerships with a family practicum component on the perspectives of families and teachers.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Pseudonyms will be used in all written data and when data from the audiotapes have been transformed into written text to protect each participant's identity. The tapes will be destroyed by December 2007 a year after the completion of the study.

## **CONTACT**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Suad Sakalli Gumus, at W.W. Wright School of Education 201 N. Rose Ave. 47405 Bloomington, IN, via phone at (812) 339-6042 or via e-mail at [ssakalli@indiana.edu](mailto:ssakalli@indiana.edu) or the dissertation committee chair Dr. Ellen Brantlinger at W.W. Wright School of Education 201 N. Rose Ave. 47405 Bloomington, IN, (812) 332-8555 and [brantlin@indiana.edu](mailto:brantlin@indiana.edu)

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, you may contact the office for the Human Subjects Committee, Carmichael Center, L03, 530 E. Kirkwood, Bloomington, IN 47408, 812/855-3067, or by e-mail at [iub\\_hsc@indiana.edu](mailto:iub_hsc@indiana.edu).

## **PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may refuse to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be destroyed.

Information Sheet date: September 9, 2005

Page 2 of 2

## Participation Script

Dear teachers and family members,

My name is Suad Sakalli Gumus and I am a doctoral student in Special Education at Indiana University, Bloomington. Throughout the Fall 2005 semester I will be collecting data for my dissertation entitled “Preparing Teachers for Partnering with Families: Examining the Impact of a Specifically Designed Curriculum on Professionals”. Data will be collected from the K548 Families, School, and the Society course participants (teachers) and Family Project participants (families). The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of a course (K548) with a family practicum attached to it (planned contact) on the perspectives of teachers and families with regard to family-professional partnerships. This study will attempt to explore whether the involvement of the participants in the course has affected their attitudes and whether this method of preparing teachers to partner with families is effective. I am e-mailing/calling you to invite you to participate in my study.

Besides using all course artifacts that accumulate throughout the semester, I will also be recruiting key participants from whom I will be collecting more in depth data through interviews. Teachers who choose their own students’ families for their Family Project and the families they are doing the project with will be recruited as key participants if they volunteer to participate. I will be conducting at least two interviews (face to face or phone interviews) with each key participant, one at the beginning and one at the end of the semester at a convenient time and place for the participants. The interviews will last approximately for an hour. Key participants will be contacted via e-mail or phone for further questions or clarification, if needed.

There will be no monetary gain, class credit, merchandise or services given for participation in this project. Data will be kept confidential at any phase of the study. Participation is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time you wish. If you decide to participate please read and sign the consent form provided.

Thank you.

### **Semi-structured Interview Question Samples**

Whose responsibility should be to initiate relationships for teacher-family partnerships (teacher or family)?

What are the most effective steps that teacher educators might take to encourage teachers to establish partnerships with families?

How can families contribute to preparing teachers to partner with them?

What do you think about power relationships between families and teachers?

What is the most valuable thing you learned from the Family Project?

Do you think you will be using the information you learned in this class in your future practice, if so what is it that you will be using?

Have you observed any changes in your practice due to experiences in this class, explain?

Does the education level of families impact the family-professional partnership, how?

Do you think your background impacts how you interact with families?

How important cultural competence for you and your practices as a special educator, why?

If you did not do your Family Project with one of your students' families why did not you prefer to do so?

What do you think about systems change and how do you envision your role in it?

How did this class and projects impact your opinions about systems change, families, and family-professional partnerships?

What would you keep or change about the whole experience?

## APPENDIX B

### Course Syllabus

#### **Special Education K548**

#### **Families School and Society**

#### **Fall 2005 Syllabus**

##### Bloomington

Gretchen Butera, Ph.D.

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856- 8153

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##### Kokomo

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##### Richmond

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Office Hours: By

##### Graduate Students

Rama Cousik

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Suad Sakalli Gumus

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Course Text:

Turnbull, A.P. & Turnbull, H.R., Erwin, E. & Soodak, L. (2006) Families, professionals and exceptionality: Positive outcomes through partnerships and trust 5<sup>th</sup> ed.. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Other assigned readings will be provided by the instructor or on reserve in the library

The purpose of this course is to present students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to provide service to individuals with disabilities within the context of their family, community and culture.

Course content (knowledge) focuses on system theory in order to examine the potential impacts of disabilities on daily lives of families and consider how the broader context of school and community both effects and is effected by interactions with individuals with disabilities and their families. Historical, legal and ethical perspectives on family involvement and empowerment are explored. Culturally competent approaches for providing services to families with members who have disabilities, are developmentally disabled, chronically ill or are at risk are also discussed.

The skill objectives of the course seek to assist students in implementing family-professional partnerships including those that address:

- 1.) Communicating in order to understand one another;
- 2.) Helping families meet basic needs;
- 3.) Assisting families in understanding the referral and evaluation process in special education
- 4.) Soliciting family participation in individualizing for appropriate education;
- 5.) Involving families in methods of extending learning in home and community;
- 6.) Engaging families in attending and volunteering at school; and
- 7.) Advocating for systems improvement.

Each of these opportunities requires professionals to establish partnerships with families based on mutual trust and equity. In order to participate in such partnerships, the following dispositions are important:

- 1.) Knowing yourself;
- 2.) Knowing families;
- 3.) Honoring cultural diversity;
- 4.) Affirming and building on family strengths;
- 5.) Promoting family choices;
- 6.) Expecting positive outcomes;
- 7.) Practicing positive communication skills; and,
- 8.) Warranting trust and respect.

The course plan is designed to help you reflect about your own experiences in and with families and consider your role in establishing partnerships with the families of individuals with disabilities. Part of this reflection will occur in the weekly web-based assignments you will complete. In addition, students are asked to form a relationship with a family over the course of the semester as part of a Family Project that will provide the context for additional reflection. Finally, each course section will meet four times during the semester to participate in group activities related to family-professional partnerships

## **Topical Outline and Assignments**

Week of August 31 **CLASS MEETING:** Introductions and overview

Assignments due 9/5:

- Vignette: It Can Happen to You! (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Identify and contact your family partners
- Reading: Hehir, T. (2002) Eliminating ableism in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72. 1-32 (respond to questions in on-line forum)

Week of September 7 Views of disability

Assignments due 9/12:

- Vignette: Nice families (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week
- Reading: Chapter 1 (respond to questions in on-line forum)

Week of September 14 Family Characteristics

Assignments due 9/19:

- Vignette: Lynn, Jerry, Derrick & Jessica (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week
- Reading: Chapter 2 (respond to questions in on-line forum)

Week of September 21 Family Interactions

Assignments due 9/226:

- Vignette: Just Selfish Enough (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week
- Reading: Chapter 3 (respond to questions in on-line forum)

Week of September 28 Family Functions

Assignments due 10/3:

- Vignette: Sam and his unrealistic expectations (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week; REMINDER-FAMILY STORIES DUE NEXT WEEK- PREPARE TO SHARE IN CLASS
- Reading: Chapter 4 (respond to questions in on-line forum)

Week of October 5 **CLASS MEETING:** Family Life Cycle AND Family Stories

**Family Stories DUE**

Assignments due 10/10:

- Vignette: Sandra speaks about Leah's school (respond to questions in on-line journal)



- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week
- Reading: Chapter 5 and Whitehouse, M. & Colvin, C. (2001) Reading families: Deficit discourse and family literacy: Theory into Practice, 40, 3. 212-219. (respond to questions in on-line forum)

#### Week of October 12 Families and Schools

Assignments due 10/17:

- Vignette: Toots in the Valley (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week
- Reading: Chapter 9 (respond to questions in on-line forum)

#### Week of October 19 Family-Professional Partnerships

Assignments due 10/24:

- Vignette: Sandra and Janet (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week
- Reading: Chapter 12 (respond to questions in on-line forum)

#### Week of October 26 Families as Partners in Special Education

Assignments due 10/31:

- Vignette: TJ gets his label (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week; REMINDER-FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS PAPER DUE NEXT WEEK-PREPARE TO SHARE IN CLASS
- Reading: Chapter 8 & 13 (respond to questions in on-line forum)

#### Week of November 2 CLASS MEETING

#### **Family-School Partnerships Papers DUE**

Assignments due 11/7:

- Vignette: Lynn talks about money (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week

- Reading: Chapter 8 (respond to questions in on-line forum)

#### Week of November 9 Families in School and Society

Assignments due 11/14:

- Vignette: Meeting Toots (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week
- Reading: Butera, G. (2005) Collaboration in the context of Appalachia: The case of Cassie. *The Journal of Special Education*, 39. 106-116. (respond to questions in on-line forum)

#### Week of November 16 Meeting Basic Needs

Assignments due 11/21:

- Vignette: Blakes Run (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week
- Reading: Chapters 1 & 2 of Milstein, M.M. & Henry, D. A. (2000) *Spreading resiliency: making it happen for schools and communities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. (respond to questions in on-line forum)

#### Week of November 23 Cultural Competence

Assignments due 11/28:

- Vignette: Toots and Monica (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week
- Reading: Back Home in Indiana (respond to questions in on-line forum)

#### Week of November 30 Advocating for Families and Schools

Assignments due 12/5:

- Vignette: Ryan and the Titans (respond to questions in on-line journal)
- Family Project: Respond to questions in on-line journal; schedule weekly visit/task for upcoming week; REMINDER-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS PAPER DUE NEXT WEEK-PREPARE TO SHARE IN CLASS
- Reading: Chapters 6-7 in Milstein & Henry (respond to questions in on-line forum)

#### Week of December 7 **CLASS MEETING**

## School-Community Projects DUE

### FINAL PROJECT REFLECTION Due By December 14

#### Course Requirements

1. Class attendance and participation- Class attendance and participation are very important. You are expected to attend all face-to-face class meetings and participate actively. In addition, you are expected to participate actively in the online activities weekly. Assignments will be posted each Wednesday. **Generally, your responses will be posted by the following Monday 6 P.M.** In addition we will participate in an interactive discussion activity during the semester. In these cases the class section will be divided into groups that post initial responses with another group responding to the postings. On these weeks, the original posters must respond by 6 P.M. on Saturday and the responders must reply by 6 P.M. on Monday. These directions will be clearly posted on Oncourse when weekly assignments are given. In addition, some weeks a parent may respond to your vignette posting. When a parent responds, a reply from you is required. Under such circumstances the importance of prompt posting is CLEAR. **Due to the importance of on-time responses, no points/credit will be given for late responses. If an emergency arises, please contact your instructor to discuss ASAP.** Because the nature of some of the discussion is potentially “emotionally-loaded” you are expected to keep the contents of class discussion confidential.

2. Family Project- Students must identify a family that contains an individual with a disability who will participate with you across the course of the semester in completing a family project. You will contact/visit this family once a week using the guidelines and prompts provided each week to write in your family project journal **weekly**. The journal entries will be used to produce three paper products: 1.) The Family Story; 2.) Family-School Partnerships 3.) Family-School-Community Relationships. Because the family you select will make an important contribution to your work, you should provide the family with help and support in return. You may consider asking the family what you might do to repay them such as providing tutoring, babysitting or other types of assistance. Your Family project will also provide the basis for the final project reflection. See Family Project Hand-Outs for More details.
3. Final Reflection Paper

#### Grading Scale

Each week you will make 3 on-line postings (vignette responses, family project journal, and reading responses/OR responses to the postings of others). Your responses should thoroughly answer each question, incorporate the readings and personal experiences, and should include thoughtful reflection. Each posting will be graded on a 0-5 scale, with a maximum of 15 points per week. Late responses will receive no points/credit.

**15 points per week x 14 weeks= 210 points**

At least 4 times you will be required to reply to a parent that responds to your vignette posting. Each reply will be graded on a 0-5 scale.

**5 points per reply x 4 replies= 20 points**

Three papers will be due throughout the semester related to the family project. Rubrics describing each paper and its requirements will be distributed throughout the semester.

**50 points per paper x 3 papers= 150 points**

A final reflection paper will be due at the culmination of the course. A rubric describing the paper and its requirements will be distributed during the semester.

**50 points per paper x 1 paper= 50 points**

**430 points total**

|         |          |    |         |         |    |
|---------|----------|----|---------|---------|----|
| 430-400 | 93%-100% | A  | 356-344 | 80%-82% | B- |
| 399-387 | 90%-92%  | A- | 343-331 | 77%-79% | C+ |
| 386-374 | 87%-89%  | B+ | 330-314 | 73%-76% | C  |
| 373-357 | 83%-86%  | B  | 313-301 | 70%-72% | C- |

**The instructors reserve the option of changing this scale or syllabus should reason and logic so dictate.**

#### Response Guide for K548 and Parent Response Schedule

Following are some guiding criteria to assist you when responding to class' weekly assignments. We will be looking for evidence that these guidelines have been used when composing your response, and the presence or absence of the listed criteria will be noted in future grades.

For all responses: Please keep in mind the course objectives throughout each assignment and response.

#### Reading Responses

Please include:

- Evidence that you have read the chapter
- Connection between chapter content, vignette, and/or family journal

- Details that support your descriptor words (i.e. my family was GREAT) and assertions (i.e. my project family does not value education)

### Vignette Responses

Please include:

- Evidence that you have attempted to take someone else's perspective (put yourself in their shoes), have looked at the situation from more than one angle, and that you have thought about possible long and short term implications
- Examples how the ideas may apply to your teaching practice, or how they may alter your thinking about families in the future
- Details that support your descriptor words (i.e. my family was GREAT) and assertions (i.e. my project family does not value education)
- Answers to each part of the question

### Family Project Journals

Please include:

- A running entry—please add on to the same document each week. Add your new entry following the feedback from the instructor.
- Responses each week to the feedback you have received—address questions or format changes in the entry for the following week
- Answers to each question, or an explanation about why an issue wasn't addressed and what was discussed instead (i.e. embarrassing topic that family opted not to answer). Remember to offer families the option not to answer.

### Responses to Parents

Please include:

- Responses to any questions they may have posed
- Acknowledgement of the perspective they provided and how that may be different than your own
- Any questions you have for them (may or may not get a response)
- Appreciation for their assistance

Weekly Parent Response Assignments

| <b>Linda</b>        | <b>Maya</b>         | <b>Paula</b>        | <b>Harry</b>        | <b>Ellie</b>        |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Week of 9/12</b> | <b>Week of 9/12</b> | <b>Week of 9/12</b> | <b>Week of 9/12</b> | <b>Week of 9/12</b> |

|                       |                     |                      |                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Heather<br>(Gretchen) | Shaun<br>(Gretchen) | Lori (Gretchen)      | Layne<br>(Gretchen)   | Stacey (Kara)       |
| Melissa               | Christopher         | Amy                  | Shonda<br>(Gretchen)  | Lameca              |
| Mitchell              | Jason               | Nicholas             | Kathryn (Karl)        | Jacie               |
| Jeffrey               | LaVonne             | Sarah                | Sandra (Karl)         | Brooke              |
| Dustin                | Kari                | Margaret             | Kimberly<br>(Karl)    | Erika               |
|                       |                     |                      | Lori (Karl)           |                     |
|                       |                     |                      |                       |                     |
| <b>Week of 9/19</b>   | <b>Week of 9/19</b> | <b>Week of 9/19</b>  | <b>Week of 9/19</b>   | <b>Week of 9/19</b> |
| Lou (Karl)            | Gail (Karl)         | Ronald (Kara)        | Jeanne (Karl)         | Barbara (Kara)      |
| Adam                  | Heather             | Carrie               | Elizabeth<br>(Karl)   | Whitney             |
| Andrew                | Michelle            | Crystal              | Seth (Karl)           | Regina              |
| Lyndsi                | Michael             | Charlotte            | Jenny (Kara)          | Michael             |
| Shane                 | Gay                 | Chris                | Anne (Kara)           | Nicole              |
|                       |                     |                      |                       |                     |
| <b>Week of 9/26</b>   | <b>Week of 9/26</b> | <b>Week of 9/26</b>  | <b>Week of 9/26</b>   | <b>Week of 9/26</b> |
| Shaun<br>(Gretchen)   | Stacey (Kara)       | Layne<br>(Gretchen)  | Heather<br>(Gretchen) | Lori (Gretchen)     |
| Christopher           | Lameca              | Shonda<br>(Gretchen) | Melissa               | Amy                 |
| Jason                 | Jacie               | Kathryn (Karl)       | Mitchell              | Nicholas            |
| LaVonne               | Brooke              | Sandra (Karl)        | Jeffrey               | Sarah               |

|      |       |                    |        |          |
|------|-------|--------------------|--------|----------|
| Kari | Erika | Kimberly<br>(Karl) | Dustin | Margaret |
|      |       | Lori (Karl)        |        |          |

|               |                |                  |              |              |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Linda</b>  | <b>Maya</b>    | <b>Paula</b>     | <b>Harry</b> | <b>Ellie</b> |
| Week of 10/3  | Week of 10/3   | Week of 10/3     | Week of 10/3 | Week of 10/3 |
| Ronald (Kara) | Barbara (Kara) | Jeanne (Karl)    | Lou (Karl)   | Gail (Karl)  |
| Carrie        | Whitney        | Elizabeth (Karl) | Adam         | Heather      |
| Crystal       | Regina         | Seth (Karl)      | Andrew       | Michelle     |
| Charlotte     | Michael        | Jenny (Kara)     | Lyndsi       | Michael      |
| Chris         | Nicole         | Anne (Kara)      | Shane        | Gay          |

|                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Linda</b>         | <b>Maya</b>          | <b>Paula</b>         | <b>Harry</b>         | <b>Ellie</b>         |
| <b>Week of 10/10</b> | <b>Week of 10/10</b> | <b>Week of 10/10</b> | <b>Week of 10/10</b> | <b>Week of 10/10</b> |
| Lori (Gretchen)      | Shonda<br>(Gretchen) | Shaun<br>(Gretchen)  | Stacey (Kara)        | Heather(Gretchen)    |
| Amy                  | Marge (Karl)         | Timothy              | Lameca               | Layne                |
| Nicholas             | Kathryn (Karl)       | Jason                | Jacie                | Mitchell             |
| Sarah                | Sandra (Karl)        | LaVonne              | Brooke               | Jeffrey              |
| Margaret             | Kimberly<br>(Karl)   | Kari                 | Erika                | Dustin               |
|                      | Lori (Karl)          |                      |                      |                      |

|                      |                      |                |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Linda</b>         | <b>Maya</b>          | <b>Paula</b>   | <b>Harry</b>         | <b>Ellie</b>         |
| <b>Week of 10/17</b> | <b>Week of 10/17</b> | <b>Week of</b> | <b>Week of 10/17</b> | <b>Week of 10/17</b> |

|                      |                      |                      |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|                      |                      | <b>10/17</b>         |                      |                      |
| Gail (Karl)          | Ron (Kara)           | Lou (Karl)           | Barbara (Kara)       | Jeanne (Karl)        |
| Heather              | Carrie               | Adam                 | Whitney              | Elizabeth (Karl)     |
| Michelle             | Crystal              | Andrew               | Regina               | Seth (Karl)          |
| Michael              | Charlotte            | Lyndsi               | Michael              | Jenny (Kara)         |
| Gay                  | Chris                | Shane                | Nicole               | Anne (Kara)          |
| <b>Week of 10/24</b> | <b>Week of 10/24</b> | <b>Week of 10/24</b> | <b>Week of 10/24</b> | <b>Week of 10/24</b> |
| Shonda (Gretchen)    | Heather(Gretchen)    | Stacey (Kara)        | Lori (Gretchen)      | Shaun (Gretchen)     |
| Marge(Karl)          | Layne                | Lameca               | Amy                  | Timothy              |
| Kathryn (Karl)       | Mitchell             | Jacie                | Nicholas             | Jason                |
| Sandra (Karl)        | Jeffrey              | Brooke               | Sarah                | LaVonne              |
| Kimberly (Karl)      | Dustin               | Erika                | Margaret             | Kari                 |
| Lori (Karl)          |                      |                      |                      |                      |

|                     |                     |                     |                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Linda</b>        | <b>Maya</b>         | <b>Paula</b>        | <b>Harry</b>        | <b>Ellie</b>        |
| <b>Week of 11/7</b> | <b>Week of 11/7</b> | <b>Week of 11/7</b> | <b>Week of 11/7</b> | <b>Week of 11/7</b> |
| Stacey (Kara)       | Lori (Gretchen)     | Heather(Gretchen)   | Shaun(Gretchen)     | Shonda (Gretchen)   |
| Lameca              | Amy                 | Layne               | Timothy             | Marge(Karl)         |
| Jacie               | Nicholas            | Mitchell            | Jason               | Kathryn (Karl)      |
| Brooke              | Sarah               | Jeffrey             | LaVonne             | Sandra (Karl)       |
| Erika               | Margaret            | Dustin              | Kari                | Kimberly            |



|  |  |  |  |        |
|--|--|--|--|--------|
|  |  |  |  | (Karl) |
|--|--|--|--|--------|

| <b>Week of 11/14</b> | <b>Week of 11/14</b> | <b>Week of 11/14</b> | <b>Week of 11/14</b> | <b>Week of 11/14</b> |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Barbara (Kara)       | Jeanne (Karl)        | Gail (Karl)          | Ron (Kara)           | Lou (Karl)           |
| Whitney              | Elizabeth (Karl)     | Heather              | Carrie               | Adam                 |
| Regina               | Seth (Karl)          | Michelle             | Crystal              | Andrew               |
| Michael              | Jenny (Kara)         | Michael              | Charlotte            | Lyndsi               |
| Nicole               | Anne (Kara)          | Gay                  | Chris                | Shane                |

| <b>Linda</b>        | <b>Maya</b>          | <b>Paula</b>         | <b>Harry</b>         | <b>Ellie</b>         |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Week of 9/21</b> | <b>Week of 11/21</b> | <b>Week of 11/21</b> | <b>Week of 11/21</b> | <b>Week of 11/21</b> |
| Heather(Gretchen)   | Shaun (Gretchen)     | Lori (Gretchen)      | Layne (Gretchen)     | Stacey (Kara)        |
| Melissa             | Christopher          | Amy                  | Shonda(Gretchen)     | Lameca               |
| Mitchell            | Jason                | Nicholas             | Kathryn (Karl)       | Jacie                |
| Jeffrey             | LaVonne              | Sarah                | Sandra Lewis (Karl)  | Brooke Robison       |
| Dustin              | Kari                 | Margaret             | Kimberly (Karl)      | Erika                |
|                     |                      |                      | Lori (Karl)          |                      |

| <b>Linda</b>         | <b>Maya</b>          | <b>Paula</b>         | <b>Harry</b>         | <b>Ellie</b>         |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Week of 11/28</b> | <b>Week of 11/28</b> | <b>Week of 11/28</b> | <b>Week of 11/28</b> | <b>Week of 11/28</b> |
| Lou (Karl)           | Gail (Karl)          | Ronald (Kara)        | Jeanne (Karl)        | Barbara (Kara)       |
| Adam                 | Heather              | Carrie               | Elizabeth (Karl)     | Whitney              |

|        |          |           |              |         |
|--------|----------|-----------|--------------|---------|
| Andrew | Michelle | Crystal   | Seth (Karl)  | Regina  |
| Lyndsi | Michael  | Charlotte | Jenny (Kara) | Michael |
| Shane  | Gay      | Chris     | Anne (Kara)  | Nicole  |

|                     |                     |                      |                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Linda</b>        | <b>Maya</b>         | <b>Paula</b>         | <b>Harry</b>        | <b>Ellie</b>        |
| <b>Week of 12/5</b> | <b>Week of 12/5</b> | <b>Week of 12/5</b>  | <b>Week of 12/5</b> | <b>Week of 12/5</b> |
| Shaun(Gretchen)     | Stacey (Kara)       | Layne<br>(Gretchen)  | Heather(Gretchen)   | Lori<br>(Gretchen)  |
| Christopher         | Lameca              | Shonda<br>(Gretchen) | Melissa             | Amy                 |
| Jason               | Jacie               | Kathryn (Karl)       | Mitchell            | Nicholas            |
| LaVonne             | Brooke              | Sandra (Karl)        | Jeffrey             | Sarah               |
| Kari                | Erika               | Kimberly<br>(Karl)   | Dustin              | Margaret            |
|                     |                     | Lori (Karl)          |                     |                     |

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Vignettes, Description of the Families in the Vignettes, and Weekly Questions**

#### **Family Vignettes**

Each week we will send you a vignette which is a short story most often told in the voice of a parent that illustrates a situation commonly encountered in families and especially in families who have contain a member with a disability. These vignettes are real stories about real families and have been collected over the years by the course instructors. Altogether, there are five families who speak their stories in the vignettes. You are only provided with the snapshot that is described in the vignette. Sometimes this brief description may make you wish you had the bigger picture of the family's circumstances. (or at least that's what former students have told us). Please remember that this brief introduction to a family is often all you have available to you when you first meet the families of the students with whom you work. Over time, you may get to know families better but often your first impressions are important to examine in order to understand how best to form a partnership with them.

#### **Lynn, Jerry, Derrick and Jessica**

Lynn and Jerry are currently in their mid-thirties. Both have college degrees. Jim works in marketing for a small television station and Lynn works part-time as an early interventionist, having obtained her master's degree after Derrick was born. Derrick is their first child. He has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. He also has limited vision and seizures. Lyn and Jerry had Jessica only after some considerable thought as they wanted to make certain that they had the resources to care for both children adequately. They own their home in a comfortable middle-class neighborhood and are active in their church. Both sets of grandparents live nearby and participate actively in the care of the Derrick and Jessica.

#### **Sandra, Andrew, Leah and Annie**

Sandra and Andrew are in their early forties. Andrew is an attorney with a busy practice in a small Midwestern city. Sandra is a stay-at-home mom who is quite active in community organizations and volunteer work. Leah is their second child. She was born with Spina Bifida and uses a wheelchair. Although her mobility is limited and she has

had a number of surgeries that necessitates her missing a number of months of school, Leah usually does well in school. Annie and Leah are quite close, although they also “fight like cats and dogs, according to Sandra. The family lives in a “showplace home” in an upper class neighborhood. Andrew comes from a socially prominent family in the community. Sandra’s family lives in the East. Although she is close to them, they see them only a few times a year.

### **Toots, Tony, Monica, Albert, Sissy and Howard**

Toots and Tony are fifty-ish. Both have high school diplomas which makes them unusually well-educated in their community. Tony works in a factory assembling heavy operating equipment and is proud to be “union.” He also is a lay minister with his own small congregation in the small West Virginia community (hollow) in which both Toots and Tony were raised and currently live. They are African-American and closely connected to the large extended family that lives in the same community. Toots works in variety of jobs to help support the family (child care, house cleaning) . Currently she is a VISTA (volunteers in service to America) which provides her with a nominal income while she does the volunteer work at the community center in Blakes Run (which she would do without pay). All four of Toots and Tony’s children have been identified at one point or another as having a disability by the school district. All of the children were seen by a speech pathologist regularly for “language delay” and had difficulty learning to read.

Currently, Albert, their oldest child is enrolled in the local community college. Tony and Toots are very proud of him.

### **Ken, Kara, TJ, and Ryan**

Ken and Kara, both near 50, are a well-educated couple who have a total of six children. The family lives in a diverse university town. Four children are adopted and two have been identified as having special needs. In addition, one of their grandchildren has been identified as having Asperger’s Syndrome. Kara is a paraeducator working with elementary grades and Ken is a high school teacher. TJ is the oldest adopted child, and now lives on his own in the same community as the rest of the family. He was identified in elementary school as having bonding and attachment disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and anger management difficulties. Ryan is also adopted, and has a mild learning disorder, along with self-confidence issues.

Both parents are active in both the community and the school system, and volunteer their time when they can.

## **Bud, Joyce, Sam, Kim and Shannon**

Bud, Joyce and Sam live in a small, picturesque Midwest state college town. Bud is a college instructor and Joyce manages a local department store. Both daughters, Kim and Shannon, are attending out-of-state colleges and Sam lives at home with his parents. Sam enjoys spending time at his dad's office, is known all over the college campus and can often be found playing video games in the student union.

Sam is 19 years old, has a mild cognitive disability, autistic like behavioral tendencies (Fragile X-Syndrome), and will graduate this year with his diploma. School has been a struggle for Sam and has required him and his parents to spend countless hours each evening around the dining room table with homework. Sam is a functional non-reader and has a note taker with a laptop attend classes with him. Sam is well liked by his teachers and is very active in Unified Special Olympics.

Sam's high school experience has included several classes at the Career Center learning basic automotive repair skills, both inclusion and self-contained academic classes and several years of vocational education training in local retail stores and restaurants. Sam has repeatedly told his teachers and parents that he does not like working in restaurants. Sam's job coach, who attends his annual transition IEP meetings, has stated that he seems happiest in a friendly, slow-paced environment.

## **Vignettes**

Vignette #1 Lynn's Story: It Can Happen to You

Vignette #2 Nice Families

Vignette #3 Lynn, Jerry, Derrick, and Jessica

Vignette #4 Sandra and Andrew- Just selfish enough

Vignette #5 Sam and His Unrealistic Expectations!

Vignette # 6 Sandra Speaks about Leah's School

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## **Vignette #1 Lynn's Story: It Can Happen to You**

When I was working on my bachelor's degree in child development, I was given the opportunity to do a semester's practicum in our community early intervention program. At the time, being very young and sensitive (or so I thought), I was absolutely overwhelmed by the children and the families I met there. One had autism, two had cerebral palsy, one was developmentally delayed with no other diagnosis and one child had spina bifida. By the time I got home every day, I was emotionally devastated. I couldn't understand why these children had to suffer so much. I couldn't understand how their families could cope. I certainly wondered what, if anything, I could do to help these kids and families. Secretly, I was very glad when my practicum ended. In the back of my mind, I thought, "I'm so sorry for these kids and families but I'm so glad that something like this doesn't (didn't, won't) happen to me!"



After I graduated I married my college sweetheart. Two years later, I became pregnant and gave birth to twins very prematurely. One son died shortly after birth and the other son was hospitalized for almost five months. When he eventually came home, he was accompanied with a series of diagnoses. He had cerebral palsy, visual impairment and a seizure disorder. It had happened to me.



The next few years included a tremendous time of adjustment for me and for my family. Looking back, it seemed to be very hard. But much of it was not so hard either. After a time I realized that it was really, after all, really okay. I was able to see in my son what I hadn't been able to see in those other kids and families years before. Derrick was a kid first and then a kid with a disability second. As a kid, he brought love and joy into our lives just as all kids do. We celebrated his accomplishments and saw ourselves in him, just as all parents do. Being his parent was not all sadness and despair as I had pictured it years before. Most of all, he was my little boy, my son, not just a poor kid with a disability.

1. Lynn describes a fear many of us experience about disabilities: It can happen to me! What are your thoughts about having a child with a disability?
2. Do you think that Lynn's original response to "those poor kids with disabilities" is a common one? Why was it not until she had her own child was Lynn able to see children with disabilities as children first?
3. How would your family respond if you had a child with a disability? (Think here about how they respond when they think something bad could happen to you. Also think about their response to disabilities in general.)
4. What do you think would be the hardest part of being a parent of a child with a disability?



## Vignette #2 Nice Families

I grew up in a family full of love and I think that my parents were (and are) pretty good parents. But there are things about my family that drive me crazy. We were and are very loud people. Bickering is the norm. There was and is always some kind of ongoing argument brewing. Much of this was not especially kept private. Once my family appeared at a neighborhood potluck dinner bearing a casserole that had stones in it. We had argued in the driveway, thrown the dinner and had had to scoop it back into the dish. No privacy for my family!

When I first met my husband's family I thought I got a chance to see how a "normal" family operates. What a relief! Dinners were so civilized. At a dining room table with candles and fine china and cloth napkins. Harsh words were never spoken. No fights, no tempers. The family got together at holidays and had very proper gatherings where no one drank too much or acted up in other ways. Not at all like my family where at a family gathering a crisis was sure to be brewing in every corner.



For some reason, this family I came to be a part of always lacked a comfort level that I had in my own family. What was wrong with me, I thought that I missed my family craziness when I was with Andrew's family? Over the years, I've slowly come to understand why this "nice" family is just as crazy and maybe crazier than my own family, only in different and less obvious ways. There are all kinds of hidden stuff in my new family- stuff that is kept carefully private. There are quiet deaths and divorce. There are unusual life styles that are never discussed. There is all sorts of substance abuse tolerated because it never is revealed or acknowledged at family gatherings!

When Leah was born with spina bifida, my parents came to see her and me in the hospital. They cried when they saw her. They cried when they saw me and they cried when they saw Andrew. They worried about what we would/should do and they agonized with us as we worried about each of Leah's

hospitalizations. They also worried about whether they were to blame in some way, sometimes blaming each other or other members of the family. But over time they have come to love Leah just as they do their other grandchildren. For a while, they were oh so careful about how to treat her. Now they treat her just like the rest of the pack. Lots of bickering and loud interactions.

Andrew's parents, on the other hand, of course also love Leah. They never cried or carried on when she was born. But it is clear to me (and to Leah) that they are embarrassed by her disability. Once his mom asked me if we always had to have our picture in the paper when Leah attended Spina Bifida camp.



Ultimately what is so unsettling to me about this family or mine is what I didn't see for so many years. The public image of this family is so strong and wonderful I was thrilled to be a part of it. Sometimes all that rubs off on Andrew and me even though Lord knows we should have lost our "nice family" image years ago when we first starting asking for help from professionals who are always sort of surprised by it. We just are still that "nice" family. I wish we weren't.

1. Why do you think Sally and Andrew might be seen as a "nice" family?
2. How do you think disability is perceived by "nice" families?
3. When do you think "denial" (like Sally describes in Andrew's family) ceases to be functional for a family and starts to become problematic

### **Vignette #3 Lynn, Jerry, Derrick, and Jessica**

One day when my son was almost four and my daughter was almost two, we went shopping at Toys R Us to find some fun ideas for their upcoming birthdays. While we were looking around, my daughter Jessica climbed up on a riser that was about six inches



off the floor to get a closer look at a Cozy Cottage toddler bed that had caught her fancy. I was standing right beside her, talking to Jerry, my husband, about how cute the bed was and about whether or not we could afford it for a birthday present. The next thing I knew, Jessica took a step backward and fell off the riser. I reached for her, but it was too late. She lost her balance, tumbled backward and fell, hitting her head on the concrete floor.

At that moment I did everything wrong! Jessica's eyes rolled back in her head and she lost consciousness. I immediately picked her up and screamed at Jerry to call 911. He was frightened and rushed off to find someone with a phone to call. I was left with Jessica in my arms. Derrick immediately began to crawl around Toys R Us while I chased after him, carrying his sister in my arms.



My daughter's face was quite gray and she was breathing shallowly. The next few minutes seemed to last for hours but Jessica finally opened her eyes as the ambulance



arrived. She wouldn't (couldn't?) speak. The paramedics examined her and felt that she was fine. Nevertheless, I insisted that she be seen by a doctor. I knew in my heart that she had suffered irreversible brain damage. She was hemorrhaging inside her skull under that beautiful head of hair. The ambulance took us to the nearest hospital and the entire way there, Jessica did not speak. My beautiful baby girl

was now going to have long term problems just like her brother. I felt like my life was over. Fortunately, Jessica really was just fine. She had sustained a bad bump on the head which resulted in a pretty impressive knot (which went away almost as rapidly as it appeared.)

She suffered no lasting effects and looking back now, I figure she probably was too scared by the commotion to speak! But I had nightmares for weeks in which I relived the

episode at Toys R Us. In my dreams, Jessica either died or had severe brain damage. All because I didn't catch her when she fell.

1. In this story, Lynn reveals how responsible she felt for the events that occurred. How reasonable do you think her response is and how common do you think it is to feel this sort of responsibility for your children?
2. How would your parents have responded in this sort of situation? Do you remember a time when your parents felt responsible for events in your life? Try to be specific here. How did it make you feel? (or describe this from your perspective as a parent.)
3. Consider the possible impact all of this might have on Jessica's role in the family. What might it be like to be Jessica? What do you suppose are the effects on Jessica of having a brother with a disability?
4. How might Lynn's reaction impact her family's cohesion and/or adaptability?
5. How could special education or other human service agencies assist the siblings of individuals with disabilities?

#### **Vignette #4 Sandra and Andrew- Just selfish enough**

Early in Leah's life, during one of our conversations with her neurosurgeon about the curious turn our lives had taken since Leah's birth, he made a curious comment. He said, "You two will do just fine. You'll be great parents because you're both just selfish enough." Initially, I was offended by what he said. Selfish was a horrible thing to be called, especially in the same context as the word parent. As time goes on, though I'm beginning to understand the point of his remark. It was first brought home for me, though when Andrew and I took our first break.

Leah was almost two and her sister Ann was almost five. Andrew (my husband) and I had just lived exhausting years of our we had to come to grips had a daughter with spina experienced before really to learn about Leah's access the services Leah family and Andrew's all about and, of course, she also needed some of emotions and specifically bottom of our list of had too many other



through the two most lives. It was taking everything with the realization that we bifida. Nothing we had prepared us for that. We had medical needs and how to needed. We had to help my family understand what it was Ann needed to understand and our attention. Our own our marriage was put at the priority worries. We simply things to worry about first.

Andrew (who is sometimes than I am) was demanding that we take a vacation away from the girls. I was good at coming up with every excuse not to go. We didn't have good enough child care. Ann and Leah wouldn't be able to handle our absence. What if one of them got sick? We couldn't afford it.

smarter about these things

All sorts of things were going on for me. I was afraid to leave the girls, having just realized for the first time how fragile life really is. I was convinced that nobody but me really knew how to care for them. I wanted some time alone with Andrew, but having put 150% of myself into my children, I'd forgotten how to be just me.

Andrew, having a little more separation from the girls and also a little more clarity about it all, finally arranged for his mother to care for the children. He found a cheap deal on airfare and a package vacation trip that was a bargain. And he simply insisted we go. When the day came, he pulled me away from the house crying. My mother-in-law, standing at the doorway, called out, “Don’t call. If we need you, we’ll call you.”

For probably followed my and did not call I’d be upset by what us either and for remembered again and me and Andrew.



the only time in my life, I mother-in-law’s advice home. Maybe I thought I learned. They didn’t call those five days I what it was like to be me

Everyone how to relax a little. easy but Andrew and that vacation. Now tough with each other or remember to be “just selfish enough.”

survived. I even learned It wasn’t and still isn’t I learned something from when we start losing ourselves, we try to regroup and

1. Sandra and Andrew’s characteristic of being “just selfish enough” seems related to your text’s description of empowerment. How did Andrew demonstrate that he was empowered to act of behalf of his family in this instance? Why do you think Sandra was unable to do so?
2. What was your own family like in terms of how they ranked marriage and children? (For example. Did your parents always put you first or did they make it clear that their marriage was an important priority?)
3. How might children respond in either case? ( For example, did you ever feel that being the center of attention in your family put pressure on you or did you feel neglected if your parents spent a great deal of time on other interests including each other)

4. How does Sandra's story reflect cultural values embedded in the macro system?
5. What does the story suggest to you about the role of respite care for families? Where is this resource embedded in Bronfenbrenner's model?

### **Vignette #5 Sam and His Unrealistic Expectations!**

Sam is a 19 year old student who soon will be 20 and is thinking about his future after high school. He and his parents are meeting with his IEP team to talk about this year's activities and life after high school. Sam has spent most of his years in a self-contained classroom focusing on functional academics and life skills. The last few years he has been gaining quite a bit of experience in a number of community-based sites both from work experiences and instructional such as grocery stores, banks and recreational centers.

Sam knows it's important to plan for the future because that is what both of his older sisters had to do. They both have left home and are attending separate colleges. Sam misses them but understands why they left. Sam has many strengths. He has some basic reading skills (about the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level) and basic money and math skills. He's a good worker and does better when he is busy. He responds well to both verbal directions and some picture prompts. He loves being in social settings. He responds initially better to men than women, until he gets to know them. When Sam isn't busy, he quickly gets into a lazy status. Sam has to be encouraged to participate in exercise and physical activity.

As the IEP team convenes, the teachers always start with describing the Sam's strength and what he has accomplished over the year. Then the questions move into "what would you like to do after high school"? This year, Sam didn't hesitate and said "I want to go to college". The teacher immediately looked around the table to the others then back to Sam and said "Sam, you know that is unrealistic because you don't have the skills and grades to go to college, so let's talk about going to work". "Where do you think you would like to work?" Sam got quiet and just said "I don't know". His parents said, why can't Sam try college. The team immediately began tell his parents why Sam couldn't go to college, and it was just unrealistic.

1. Describe Sam's life cycle stage and the key issues he and his family likely were facing.
2. Why do you think Sam and his family felt it was important for Sam to try college?
3. If you were sitting in that IEP, how would you have responded?



4. What other options and resources could the teachers have presented to Sam and the family?
5. Many of our students have dreams about the future, some positive and possible and others not so possible. How do we ensure that we don't diminish any of our students' dreams while making them reachable?

## Vignette # 6 Sandra Speaks about Leah's School



Leah, who has spina bifida, and I spent much of her early childhood years at our local Easter Seals receiving early intervention services. I am very grateful to the folks who work there who taught us both a great deal about how to work as co-collaborators with professionals in order to develop plans that helped Leah learn. Much of Leah's current success in school should be credited to the efforts of the professionals there. A great deal of what I know how to today to work as an advocate for my kid comes as a result of the team behaviors I was taught in early intervention. Working as a team member and telling professionals MY goals and objectives and opinions (as well as those of our family) did not always come easily to me but I did learn to be an active team member. By the time Leah was ready for kindergarten, I was ready to become a full and active member of her IEP team.

I naively expected that my presence and active participation was expected of me and that the school would welcome me as a team member.

When I marched myself into the principal's office to talk about Leah's transition to kindergarten about eight months before she was due to start school I learned how wrong I was. Clearly, she (the overeager mother. She told to be helpful! How nice!" meeting for May with her clear she was annoyed at me before she had a chance to do explained to me. "I take this school." Oops! I had



At the May meeting, talking about Leah's transition lot. I wanted Leah to be as integrated as possible but she was also just learning wheelchair skills. I had suggestions for classroom setup, lunchroom procedures and Leah's needs for catheterizing. The principal tried to better each one of my suggestions with one of her own.

principal) labeled me as an me she was so glad I was "trying When I suggested we schedule a teacher for the next year, it was for suggesting this next step so. This is "my job", she personal pride in what happens in stepped on her toes big time!

she was ready for me! I had been with her early intervention team a

Thinking back, I wonder if I could have handled all of this better. The kindergarten teacher turned out to be wonderful with Leah and she had a great year. Later she told me that my behavior was new to the school. The principal was not used to parents “calling the shots”. Generally, the school is cooperative with me. I wouldn’t call us a team, though. Now and then, the principal finds the need to put up some kind of brick wall when I have a suggestion for how to help Leah be fully included in school activities. I think she likes to remind me “who’s boss.”

1. Clearly, Sandra is an active parent when it comes to Leah’s education. How active was your family (of origin) with your school and your teachers? Do you remember your parents ever “going to bat” for you? Under what sort of circumstances? Are you (or will you be) active in the education of your own children? In what ways?
2. What were some of Sandra’s roles as illustrated by this story? (see Chapter 5)
3. Have you experienced the sort of treatment by a professional that Sandra describes? How did you respond?
4. The transition from the intimate atmosphere of early intervention to a less personalized relationship in public school is often a difficult (though necessary) one. This sort of climate change happens at many transitions for individuals with disabilities and their families. What are some specific ways this transition might be eased for families?
5. How much do you like to be in control, or the one with the right answers? How do you think this personality trait played into the relationship between Sandra and the principal? Does this happen for you sometimes?

## Vignette # 7 Sandra and Janet

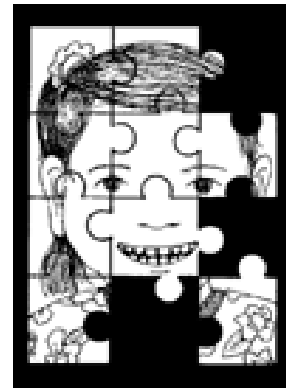
When Leah was three months old, she was hospitalized for a few days for some diagnostic tests. On the second day, she got a room-mate -- another baby girl with spina bifida! The nurses had orchestrated the room arrangement and were eager to tell me all



about it. It was meant to be, they thought. First of all, the babies were both named Leah! Their dads were both lawyers and both had stay-at-home moms. They both even had an older sibling about the same age. “You’ll just love each other!” the

nurses gushed. For years every time we participated in events through Children’s Hospital or the Spina Bifida Support Group, we were paired with that family. They were a nice family but despite our similarities, we never really hit it off. We just did not really have anything in common.

When Leah was two, she started preschool at Easter Seals. The session did not last long enough and it was too long a drive for me to go back home after dropping her off. Sometimes I ran errands but often I sat in the lobby, looking at magazines and covertly looking at the other who sat there. Leah and I had emerged from the past years of intensive medical interventions and care for friends. She was busy, having a great time making friends while I sat there. I was looking for someone to friends with—someone like the other Leah’s mom—like me. It was lonely most of the time.



lobby, folks few looking new be someone

One day Leah came out of the class with the other half of what had become a pair: Leah and Cara Beth! They were like two little bookends. They looked alike, had similar disabilities and similar personalities. They were so cute and devoted to each other as only two year olds can be! However, when I was introduced to Cara Beth’s mother, Janet, I thought, “No, she’s not like me!” I had seen her for weeks, also sitting in the lobby waiting for her child, but we had never spoken. She often wore torn blue jeans or red stretch pants that I’d not be caught dead in! She didn’t seem anything like me. She was different from me. We probably had nothing in common.

As the weeks passed, Janet and I began to talk as we sat in the lobby. I quickly learned that there was hope for a new friendship. First of all, Janet was funny! She was full of opinions and talked openly about her life as the unmarried mother of three children, living with Joe, the plumber's assistant and Cara Beth's father. Janet was interesting and, best of all, when she talked about her feelings and concern for Cara Beth I always found myself saying, "I feel that way, too!" She was like me! I found myself looking forward to seeing Janet in the lobby at preschool.

Over the years, Janet and I have become good friends and I treasure her friendship very much even though our lifestyles differ in many ways. Her views on things have enriched my understanding about many things, not the least of which is mothering my children. I hope my friendship has done the same for her. When I think about that, I chuckle, thinking about all that time I wasted in the lobby, looking for "someone like me."

1. Do you have a friend that many people would perceive as nothing like you? Why or why not?
2. Shared experience is often the cement that bonds friends together. What sorts of shared experiences have you had with friends that have worked this way?
3. Why do you think Sandra did not see Janet as like her in the beginning?
4. How does working with families who are NOT like you impact your ability to build trusting, collaborative partnerships?
5. How do you build relationships among the families you work with?

## Vignette # 8 Toots in the Valley

The day I first learned about Monica's school difficulties, I noticed Toots was exceptionally quiet. I was busy talking to my usual set of folk who were gathered in the



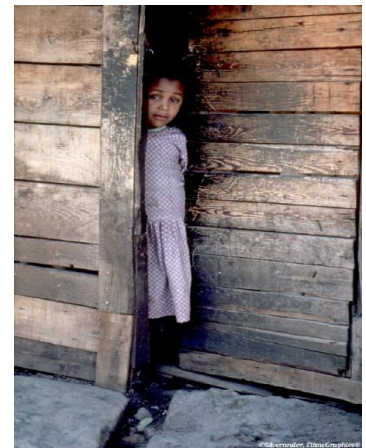
BRCC cafeteria and were willing to share their stories with me. Toots came in and joined us. I didn't notice her at first because she was so quiet. Finally I realized that she was not her usual self. I was so used to her telling jokes and elaborating on what somebody was telling me, giving me needed details about Blakes Run history. I asked her what was wrong

and she asked if she could talk to me in private. At this point I was really alarmed because it isn't really Toots to want to talk in private and in Blakes Run, everyone knows everyone else's business anyway. We went into her "office". As soon as she closed the door, Toots' eyes filled with tears.

"I really didn't know Monica was having such problems. Now the school sent home these forms for me to sign. They want to put her in a special class in junior high school. She's been going to speech just like her sister but now they want to put her in another class so she can get more help. She doesn't really read very well, I know. I guess that might be good if she gets help but she don't want to go. She wants to stay with Sasha and Sissy and Nicole- all her friends, you know, and she is going to junior high next year and she doesn't want to be different. So I want to know, do you think I should sign the papers? Tony says I shouldn't- that she needs to stay with her friends."

I sigh and ask, "what papers?" and end up seeing what I was expecting to see when Toots pulls them from her purse. - the usual color-coded set of parental consent forms to conduct a psychological evaluation. I tell Toots that the forms are just to assess Monica, not to put her in a special class. She says that everyone of her friends have told her that the test is just the first step in putting Monica in a special class. I suggest that she ask the school psychologist or principal about all of this and Toots asks me to go with her down to the Valley School. I agree to go the next time I'm in Blakes Run.

The following week Toots and I make the trip down to Valley School. Toots has arranged for us to speak to the principal at the junior high school. Apparently when she spoke to him about setting up the meeting she voiced the



concerns she and Tony have about the school's plans for Monica, because he is ready for us when we arrive.

"I think you need to visit Mr. Adams class, Mrs. Jackson, before you come to any conclusions. We need to do some careful assessments before we make any decisions, but I want you to know about the possibilities." Toots and I find ourselves lead down the corridor to a classroom where a young teacher is conducting class. We are introduced to him: Mr. Adams. The passing bell rings but the students in Mr. Adams class do not leave the room. With Mr. Adams permission, the principal settles us into the back of the classroom to watch the instruction.

If this visit to the potential classroom is supposed to make us feel better about the school's plans for Monica, it sure doesn't have that effect. Toots and I sit and watch the activity and I become increasingly concerned about Monica and Toots. If the school thinks Monica will do well in this setting, I am pretty certain they are not aware of what actually happens in the classroom. Poor Mr. Adams has twenty-three kids in the class and I doubt if he understands the first thing about how to manage this set of disengaged and disorderly set of students. I'm not sure what the activity we are watching is supposed to be, but the entire time we are in the classroom I notice that considerably less than half of the students at any one time are actually doing anything that looks like it is related to academic learning. They appear to be reading short passages and answering multiple choice questions that they then grade by referencing an answer booklet. There are only 2 of these booklets available so kids are often either fighting over who's next to use it or waiting for it to be available. A large filing cabinet appears to contain the reading passages from which students select the next assignment. Mr. Adams's time is divided between trying to get students to back to work and graphing students' scores on their assignments on a large wall chart. We are in Mr. Adams class the entire morning and we return another day later in the week. I never see Mr. Adams actually teaching anybody anything.

1. Why do you think the classroom activity appears so problematic to the author and to Toots?
2. Why might the school decide to offer a class like this to students who are having trouble reading?
3. How might the class be structured so as to deliver more individualized instruction to students?

4. How could Toots address her concerns with school personnel?
5. Have you ever encountered a teacher like Mr. Adams in your own school experience? Were your parents concerned? What did they do about it?



### **Vignette #9 TJ Gets His Label**

TJ was adopted when he was 22 months old. When we first saw him, he was with his foster parents, and had been with them for 4 months. As they left the room, TJ



continued to play with some toys on the floor. Then the adoption facilitator brought TJ over to us. He was all smiles! We put him in the car and took him home. Never a whimper, never a tear. When it became bedtime, TJ went right down, closed his eyes, and drifted off to sleep. My husband and I thought we had just found the most wonderful child!

As time continued, TJ began to grow, but he was never very cuddly. He smiled a lot, and laughed, but he never grew close to us. We began to notice that he had a temper. As he entered pre-school and then kindergarten, he began to have troubles with other kids. He would get into pushing matches with them and would have to be separated from them. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, his temper got him in a lot of trouble. One day as a teacher was physically trying to keep TJ in his place in a line, he slugged the teacher in the stomach. He was suspended from the school for two weeks. The principal told me that I “had better start teaching that kid how to behave” at home before I could bring him back to school. He put the blame for all of TJ’s problems right back on me, and made me feel that I was a bad parent!

My dad said to me that I shouldn’t feel too bad, that “he was broke when you got him, and you can’t fix him.” At this point, we decided it was time to get some professional help for TJ, since his behavior was beyond our comprehension and control. We saw a pediatric psychiatrist, and she diagnosed TJ as having a Bonding and Attachment Syndrome, Bi-Polar Disorder, and ADD. We went back to the school to see if we could get TJ some educational help. We ran into the same wall as we had when TJ was suspended in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. The principal said that because it was such a small school district, they couldn’t offer TJ any special treatment. We fought with the school system for 4 years before he was identified as learning disabled and offered services under IDEA.



The entire time that we were trying to get TJ identified as disabled, some of his teachers and administrators continued to make us feel as though everything that was

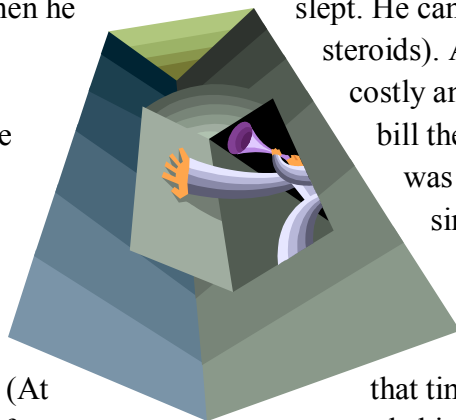
wrong with TJ was all our fault. His 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher told me that she didn't like working with him because "he was a violent student," and she "didn't feel safe when he was in the classroom." I asked what he had done to warrant this, she told me it was his history in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. You can't imagine how shocked and sad I felt when she said those things about my son.

Finally, during his 6<sup>th</sup> grade year, the school principal told us that TJ had been "officially" identified as learning disabled and would be educated in the neighboring county. Since we lived in a predominately rural area, several school districts grouped together to provide services for disabled kids at one school. TJ had to change schools. He rode a bus 70 minutes each way and he had to make all new friends, but at least he was in a special education class. If I had it to do all over again, I would never have forced the school's hand. We all suffered because they were unwilling to make allowances for TJ.

- 1 What signs did this mom note early on that TJ might have emotional problems?
2. How did school personnel contribute to the family's challenges in responding to TJ's behavior problems? Where did the collaboration break down? How could this situation have been handled differently?
3. How could schools address prevention and early intervention of behavior problems more effectively (consider the positive behavior supports described in Chapter 11)?
4. The manner in which TJ's history appeared to follow him through school is of concern to this mom. Do you think that this sort of "bad boy" reputation is likely to follow some students in your school? If so, what could we do about it?

### **Vignette #10 Lynn talks about money**

When Derrick came home from the hospital, he was still very sick and required enormous amounts of care. He needed continuous oxygen for fifteen months. He had an apnea monitor because he had frequent episodes of low heart rate and sometimes stopped breathing when he slept. He came home on five different medications (including steroids). All of this equipment and medications were very costly and, even before, we left the hospital we knew that the bill there tallied over \$500,000. I had quit my job when he returned husband were now not qualify high (Hah!). (At requirement for that time there was no income waiver premature babies like Derrick.)



Every week, exhausted by lack of sleep and worry, I met the home health care truck driver at the door to collect Derrick's medical supplies. They needed a check for 1500.00 before they would begin dropping anything off and promised to reimburse us when the insurance check came through. Every month we had to come up with this money! Our savings were quickly gone and all hopes of ever being able to afford our own house had also evaporated.

Jerry and I were taught, however, that it was tacky to talk about money. As the months passed, he became more and more stressed trying to figure out how he was going to meet our enormous bills. I just became frazzled beyond belief but we never really talked about it together. Finally, one afternoon, while I was sitting outside for a breath of fresh air while Derrick napped, our early interventionist arrived and sat down beside me. I guess she could see I was at the end of my rope. I was just too beside myself for self-control and I ended up telling her all about our financial woes. She was very sympathetic, listening carefully to all I told her and promising to find a way to help. The next week she arrived loaded with paperwork for an emergency application for Title XIX Waiver services for Derrick. We completed the paperwork together and within



three months (and, believe it or not, this is very fast for this kind of help) we had an answer: Derrick was eligible for Title XIX!

1. In this story, Lynn discusses a problem that is common for families who face special challenges: embarrassment associated with asking for help. Is this a feeling that you are familiar with? Give a specific example of a time when you were embarrassed to ask for help and explain why.
2. Lynn refers to a macrosystem value- “discussing money is tacky.” Was this part of your upbringing as well? Where do you think this value comes from (why might families ascribe to it)?
3. How did the early interventionist practice good communication skills?
4. Lynn and Jerry would explain to you that eventually most of Derrick’s hospital bill was covered by Jerry’s insurance. Some of it was paid off and the rest of it was “forgiven”. However, the issue of insurance is an ongoing problem for this family. Many insurance policies have lifetime caps and Jerry career choices have been limited by his need to make certain that Derrick’s coverage will be adequate to meet his ongoing needs. What does the story of Derrick’s birth suggest to you about how systemic factors influence family and child outcomes?

### **Vignette #11 Meeting Toots**

I am in Kathy's office at the BRCC when Arlene (Toots) comes rushing in with her daughter, a tall pretty young African- American girl named Monica who looks about fourteen. Toots looks to be in her late forties. She is tall and has reddish hair and the sort of hazel eyes of many African Americans in this part of the state. I am relieved at Toots arrival because almost everyone I have talked to has told me that I need to talk to Toots if I want to understand Blakes Run and its relationship with the school. When I called Toots earlier in the week, she agreed to meet me at the BRCC at 11 but now it is nearly 11:30 and she is late. She apologizes and explains that "everything that could get messed up just did it this morning." She doesn't have much time to talk this morning either, she says and she asks me to forgive her. Toots has a thick dialect and I have to work hard to understand her. It is my turn to ask for her forgiveness when I have to keep asking her to repeat herself. I tell Toots about feeling like an outsider because I sound like I'm from "up north" and she snorts at me. "No," she says, "You sound fine. I sound like a hick!"

In the half hour we have to talk, Toots tells me that she has lived in Blakes Run all her life. Her father and her husband were both coal miners in the Blakes Run Mine until it closed several years ago. "Now Tom works over in Bumper at the aluminum plant. But he's also the pastor at God's Entry." Toots was a stay-at-home mother for years but she always did a lot of volunteering at the school. "Now I get paid for what I always did anyway." She runs the class at the high school for pregnant teens during the lunch hour. "We spend a lot of time talking about being a good mom. The dads come too, sometimes. It's so nice to get paid now that we got a grant. I used to talk to the girls about what they were going to do anyway."

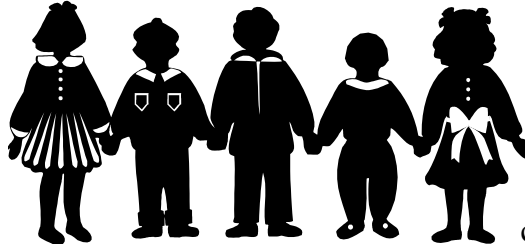
Monica begins to get restless as we talk. Toots explains that she brought Monica when her cousin had an emergency this morning. We were supposed to read and act out The True Story of the Three Little Pigs for the kids today. I recruited Monica to help me out and we were late because Monica said she wouldn't do it unless we had a chance to practice. (Monica roles her eyes at that.) Toots sighs, "I also told Alfie in the kitchen that I would help him get lunch ready. We're making hamburgers and the VISTAs did not pick up the meat in Rob's freezer. Now Alfie is struggling to get it cooked on time."

As Toots and Monica leave, I tell Toots how I thought she was two different people because I kept hearing about her as Toots and as Arlene. She explains that in Blakes Run she is always Toots but at school “they call me Arlene. I lost an election that way. I ran for the School Improvement Council and I was on the ballot as Arlene. Half the people voting only knew me as Toots.”

1. What notions of community are evident in this story?
2. What different communities does it appear Toots belongs to? What evidence of mismatch appears in the story?
3. What community characteristics about Blakes Run emerge from Toots’ story?
4. What sorts of communities do you belong ? Have you ever experienced the sorts of community mismatch that is described in Toots’ story?
5. How might schools working with children from Blakes Run honor and respect the children’s community?

## Vignette #12 Blakes Run

You have to visit Blakes Run to really understand it but I'd guess it's not unlike a lot of rural communities that have seen tough economic times and survived somehow. But Blakes Run is also unusual in that it is an integrated/segregated community that somehow managed to avoid the upheaval in race relations of many communities during the past fifty years. When I first got interested in Blakes Run and the residents told me there were no racial tensions in the community, I flat out disbelieved it. As I've come to know the place better, I've realized that it's true.



Residents of Blakes Run maintain their racial identity in that you know which side of the street everyone lives on and which church they attend, but they all get along. The kids play together and there is a great deal of community child rearing going on as neighbors watch neighbors' children in an informal fashion that reminds you of an earlier time in our history. Since the Blakes Run School closed a decade ago, the community's children have traveled together on the bus down to the Valley School. Although the Blakes Run children do make friends with other children while at school, they also tend to stick together at school. You see the girls playing jump rope together at recess and the boys always form their own teams for softball or kickball games. Valley teachers have a good opinion of Blakes Run children. They report that the kids are polite and well-mannered

Blakes Run is at the end of a long narrow hollow. There is a (now closed) mine at the end of the hollow. It was one of several integrated mines in West Virginia in the earlier part of the last century. The cookie cutter company houses on one side of the street belong to the black folks; the same type of houses on the other side of the street belong to the white folks. Each side has its own churches (two a piece). Everyone (maybe 500 people in total) goes to the church of their choice on Sunday morning and mid-week for prayer services. But on special occasions the like Christmas, Easter or a pastor's anniversary, the whole community attends one of the churches together.

The folks living in Blakes Run are poor since the mine closed but the current residents are attached to their community or lack the resources to move to a place where employment is easier to find. When I say poor, I mean really poor (median income was \$14,000 last year). Many of the adults in the community are on disability or are unemployed. The ones that do have work travel out of the community, usually making a twenty-five mile drive down the mountain to Bumper to work in the aluminum plant. Some of the Black women do housework for "rich folks" in Charleston, typically carpooling together several days a week, starting out very early and returning after dark.



An important resource to the community is the Blakes Run Community Center (BRCC) which is housed in the former Blakes Run School after it closed in the seventies. BRCC is run by a community collaborative but the driving force behind it is Rob Charles, a former VISTA in the community who stayed after his term of service ended. Rob sees to it that the BRCC is funded by writing grants and cajoling others to do the same. BRCC is a nutrition site. The state and federal government provides some of the funding for the food that is served there but supplies often run short. Early on I got in the habit of ALWAYS bringing canned goods with me when I visited Blakes Run and I know that never was any of it wasted. The BRCC also houses the public health clinic once a month. Those are just a few of the many community activities that are sponsored by BRCC. Any day of the week, you can find Blakes Run residents hanging out at the BRCC watching television, gossiping or just sitting at the picnic table in the front of the building, smoking cigarettes and watching the cars go by. There is an afterschool program for the children who get a snack and dinner and help with their homework.

1. What sorts of community assets are apparent in Blakes Run, despite its poverty?
2. In what ways does Blakes Run remind you of the community you grew up in or now live in?
3. What sorts of experience do you have with communal child rearing?
4. What sorts of problems related to children do you think Blakes Run might have?
5. What sorts of assets and problems related to children do you think are apparent in your community?



### **Vignette #13 Ryan and the Titans**

Ryan has always been a little lacking in the area of self-confidence. He's a good son, but I'm concerned about his ability to accept criticism. Ryan is a soccer player and



tried out for the high school team his freshman year. Although he's been playing for many years, he's never played at the level that these high school kids play. And he's never had a coach who is as vocal and aggressive as the high school coach. I've always taught Ryan that playing fair and playing hard are the most important aspects of the sport, but now his coach is drilling into him that winning is everything.

In addition to lacking self-confidence, Ryan is a very sensitive kid. Harsh words crush him. He becomes defensive and loses sight of his goal. On the other hand, words of praise carry him over the tops of the mountains. Here lies the rub. Ryan may not be the best player on the soccer team, but he certainly has the most heart. He plays every practice as if it's a championship game, gives the coach 100% everyday. And he's steadily getting better at his skills. But the coach yells at him, screams at him, even curses at him, without ever a word of encouragement. Now, he is not the only player to receive this treatment, but to Ryan, it's all individual and centered only on him.

He comes home from practices emotionally beaten, and I wonder if he will even go to practice the next day. I have offered to talk to the coach for him and explain to him that his behavior is detrimental improve and flourish, but make the offer. He's afraid things worse for him. I'm at a support him here. I want to needs to use a more gentle swearing at my son is not only unacceptable.



to Ryan's ability to Ryan cringes when I that I will just make loss as to how to tell the coach that he approach, and that unneeded, but also

Ryan made the team, but plays at the JV level. His team did very well this year, and expected to win their sectional. He was told by the coach that, if he practiced really hard for the last two weeks of the regular season, Ryan would be rostered for the post-season tournaments. He was as high as a kite! Totally excited and could think of nothing but soccer. I've never seen him work so hard. Then, the night of the first sectional game, the coach told Ryan that he couldn't play, that the coach had neglected to place his name on the roster. No apologies, no offer to correct the mistake. Ryan cried as he walked across the field to tell me that he couldn't sit on the bench with his team for this, the most important game of his life. I started to cross the field, to talk to the coach, but Ryan grabbed my coat, and said "Dad, you'll only make things worse. They will think I sent you over there to beat him up."

1. Were you ever in a position such as this, either as the parent or as the child? How did you react to your particular situation?
2. What could Ryan's dad have done to overcome his feelings of helplessness and inability to protect his child in these situations?
3. At what point must we allow those for whom we are advocating to "fend" for themselves?
4. Do you see the role of teachers and coaches as surrogate parents? If so, how do we insure those surrogates uphold the same standards as the parents? If not, how do we justify a lack of parental concern and involvement in school and sports?

### **Vignette #14 Dad and me**

(this vignette is written by the father of TJ and Ryan, who were mentioned in previous vignettes)

I was born the son of a Baptist minister. As I grew up, I was taught the ways of Christian moral values, as well as the values of family. My parents always stood by my side in anything that I did. My dad was one of my closest friends, he and I worked together, played together, and I grew up under his watchful eye.



I graduated from high school in 1966, and was going to begin college in the fall. The troop buildup in Viet Nam was just beginning, and it was obvious that I was going to be drafted. In order to make sure that I had some choice in what I would do in the Army, I opted to enlist. I was offered officer's training, and took it, knowing that I would end up in the infantry, and would be going off to war, but I was sure that my station in the Army would be better as an officer than an enlisted man.



My dad was devastated that I had enlisted. He told me again that it was a sin to take a life, just as he had when I was a child. My visits home during my training were awkward; we just didn't seem to have anything to talk about anymore. It all came to a head when I finally got my orders for Viet Nam. I was to join the First Cavalry

Division in 60 days. My dad wanted to personally see the orders, he took them into his bedroom to look at them. A few minutes later, he came back and gave them to me without a word. The next days passed very slowly as we avoided each other, each of us trying not to instigate an argument about my life choices.

Two months later, as I was visiting my parents for the last time before I was to leave, my mother told me that Dad had called the Chief of Chaplains at the Pentagon and offered his services, as long as he could be assigned to the same battalion as me in the First Cavalry. My dad



had volunteered to go to war, so that he could continue to watch over me.

1. How did the dad and son differ in the way they viewed the situation? Which one of them held views more like your own?
2. Why did the dad want to participate in something he did not believe in? Do you think this sort of response is common for parents? Would your parents have had a similar response? Would you?
3. What message does this story have for you as you finish up your FINAL vignette?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Family Project and Project Related Assignments**

The major project for this class is called the Family Project. This is presented as an opportunity for you to become familiar with the situation and difficulties surrounding a family that includes a member with a disability. Your interaction with the family is important to your successful completion of the course requirements. The purpose of this project is to help you acquire experience and perspective on the delivery of services within the context of families that include members with disabilities. Be sure that the family is comfortable with your work with them. Try to select a family with whom you also feel some degree of comfort. You must have a family member (mother or father) sign that you have permission to conduct your project with their family and return it to your instructor.

#### **What Kind of Family Should I look for?**

Typically, we feel more comfortable with people who are like us. In this project, we want you to expand your horizons by getting out of your comfort zone. All of us know a family with a member who is disabled. You should select a family that has the greatest degree of disability with which you are comfortable. Obviously, the tasks associated with caring for a family member with a severe mental or physical disability are much more difficult than those involved in caring for a member with a minor disability. We want you to develop a greater understanding for the experiences of those families in dealing with schools and society. The family member with a disability need not be of school age, indeed the member may even be an adult member of the family.

#### **How Do I Find Such a Family?**

You have a great number of resources at hand, and you should use them! Fellow class members may know multiple families that are willing to be a part of your education. Faculty at your school may be a resource for you, talk with the Special Education department head. You may want to talk with folks at your place of worship; they may have suggestions for you. Families are everywhere, you simply have to look.

Since you are teaching, you may have a child with a disability within your classroom. We are at the beginning of the semester and this might be a good opportunity for you to get to know the family of your student. You may be able to choose a family of a different

culture or alternative life style, allowing you to learn more about that aspect at the same time. You should select a family with whom you have (or can have) an ongoing relationship over the semester. You should explain to the family the purpose of your contacting them (so you can learn), assure them of the confidentiality of any information they share with you.

### **How Do I Begin?**

You should keep an electronic journal of your work with your family. Each contact you make with them should be recorded and you should include a summary of what you have learned including your opinions, impressions, thoughts, etc. As much as possible include what family members actually said in their own words. Plan to meet with your family once a week. A weekly list of discussion topics will include:

- A description of your family's story
- A discussion about the family's relationships in the schools
- And an examination of community resources available to your family

You should send your family notebook to your instructor via Oncourse weekly after you have met with your family so that your instructor can give you suggestions and/or feedback. Keep in mind what your concept of an ideal world for families looks like as well as the ideas of the family you come to know.

Any questions, concerns or comments, contact your instructor as soon as possible! As you can see, this project represents a major portion of your requirements in this class, so it is incumbent upon you to understand it and respond in Oncourse on a weekly basis.

## **Family Journal and Family Project Weekly Task Descriptions**

### **Family Journal due September 5th**

Task 1: Secure family for practicum experience.

Task 2: Respond to the following questions or prompts in the family journal drop box. Describe the process of selecting your practicum family. What characteristics did you consider? How did you approach your family? How did they respond? What do you know about this family? How do you know these things?

Task 3: Set-up a time to be with the family next week in order to gather your impressions regarding family characteristics.

### **Family Journal due September 12th**

• Task 1: From your family observation, describe the “inputs”- the family characteristics of your Project Family.

1. What is the family size and form?
2. What is the position of the individual with a disability in the family?
3. What is the cultural background of your Project Family?
4. What is the status of your Project family in the community? (Consider how the families in Nice Families were described.)
5. Think about the microculture of your project family and describe which of the aspects listed on p.10 of your text seems to influence your family
6. Consider the role of cultural values in influencing how your Project family interacts with others in their community. Would you describe your family as having an individualistic perspective or a collective perspective? Do they have confidence in system-centered or relationship-centered solutions?
7. How would you describe the SES status of your family? How do they feel about their ability to access financial resources to meet their needs?
8. Where does your family live and how does it impact their ability to meet the needs of their members?
9. Describe the characteristics of the individual with a disability in this family. How was the disability diagnosed?
10. How does the family appear to manage issues associated with family stress? (use the list on p. 21)
11. Describe any special challenges facing your Project Family.
12. Reflect about what you have learned about your Project Family. How are they like your own family? How are they different?

• Task 2: Set up a time to talk next week with one of your Project Family members (parent, guardian) about family interactions

### **Family Journal due September 19th**

• P: Task 1: From your family observation, describe typical interactions in your Project Family.

Use the following questions to guide your observations:

1. Describe each of the family subsystems in your Project Family (marital, parental, sibling and extended family)
2. How did the parental partners meet? How cohesive is the partnership?
3. What impact did having children have on the marriage?
4. What sorts of relationships does each parent seem to have with the children?
5. What sorts of beliefs about parenting are apparent?

6. What are the sibling relationships like in your Project Family?
  7. How does your Project family interact with the extended family?
  8. Think about the degree of cohesion in your Project Family. How does this impact how the family manages daily life tasks.
- Task 2: Set up a time with your Project Family next week to discuss family functions.

### **Family Journal due Oct 10**

Task 1: From your family observation/discussion, describe the roles/involvement the parent(s) take in their child's education. Describe their impressions of school meetings and functions. How has the "disadvantage discourse" impacted the family you are working with?

- P: Task 2: Establish a time to observe your family's school with a professional that works with their child (at a therapy session, IEP meeting, etc.) OR set up a time to discuss the professionals your family works with. Ask about evidence related to the partnership principles (does your family feel heard? how? do they feel they can trust their providers? why or why not? What types of conflicts have arisen? How have they been resolved?). Read communication from their professionals (daily log, notes home, IEP, etc).

### **Family Journal due Oct 17**

Task 1: From your family observation/discussion, describe the relationship your family has with professionals they interact with. Are trusting partnerships formed? How? What forms of communication did you observe/read? How are conflicts resolved? What changes would you make?

Task 2: Observe the family after school or on a weekend and pay attention to homework routines, challenging behaviors, and any activities with friends. Establish a time to ask your family about the evaluation/diagnosis process. Read the student's IEP if you haven't yet and discuss the first IEP meeting.

### **Family Journal due Oct 24**

Please Note: This week you are required to report on both Task 1 and Task 2. For Task 1, describe the process in the district in which you work, or in the district in which your project family attends. Please specify if you are discussing your district or that of your family.

Family Project Task 1: Describe the pre-referral, referral, evaluation, and diagnosis



process in your school or in the school of the family you are working with. You should either interview the parent or the individual most responsible for evaluations in the school. How might a student be referred for special education? What sorts of assistance are available to students before special education referral is made? What opportunities are available for parents to participate in the evaluation process? How is evaluation data shared with parents?

Family Project Task 2: Examine and report on the IEP document that is currently in place for your student. Are all the required components in place? Do you think it is reflective of the concerns of the family? Does it look like it would be useful in guiding an intervention effort? As a teacher would you consult it in order to plan instruction? Are there provisions for modifying or accommodating the students in order to address his/her needs in the general education curriculum? Do they look like they were considered based on individual need or are they a pretty “stock” set of suggestions? How are supplementary aids and services addressed? Use the material in chapter 12 (especially the figures) to critique the IEP document in question. You are not going to have to share this with anyone but your instructors so get critical! How could the document be improved?

Task 3: Set up a time to speak with the family about the referral and evaluation process they participated in, as well as recollections from their first IEP meeting.

### **Family Journal due Oct 31**

Please Note: Again this week, Task 1 and 2 are due 10/31. Task 3 is due in class on 11/2.

Task 1: From your family observation/discussion, describe the family’s impression of the referral and evaluation process they originally participated in? How did they contribute/participate? How were they told of their child’s diagnosis? What do they recall from their first IEP meeting? Does the family know what services are required per the IEP? How does the family think the process could be improved?

Task 2: Observe the student of your family in an inclusive setting. (In a classroom would be great, but it would also be valuable to observe him/her on the playground, in a community setting (i.e., church) or any other opportunity s/he has to interact with his peers .The purpose of this assignment is to get a sense of the student’s opportunities for social interaction and issues related to social-emotional/behavioral aspects of the child’s educational environment. Include a detailed observation report in your journal entry that describes the sorts of teacher-student interaction or peer interactions you observe and the overall quality of the interactions. Discuss the sorts of classroom management strategies in use with the teacher and how the student responds to them.

Task 3: Family-School Partnership Activity Due next week...

Task 4: Set up a time to meet with your family to discuss self-determination issues.

### **Family Journal due Nov 7**

Family Project Task 1: Use the Figure on page 213 in your text to have a conversation with your project family about self-determination. What does your conversation reveal about the family's values? How might these values translate into long-term goals for their children?

Task 2: Set up a time to talk with your family about community resources and supports

### **Family Journal due Nov 14**

Family Project Task 1: Discuss support groups and other community resources with your project family. Have they attended any support groups? How helpful have they found them? Why or why not?

What kinds of resources have they accessed to help them understand their child's disability and respond to their needs? What formal and informal resources do they think help them parent? (consider here-extended family members as a resource along with community members, church families, friends etc.) What do they know about their eligibility for resources such as Medicaid, SSI or other family support programs?

Task 2: Arrange to attend a family event with your family such as a sporting event, church activity or any other event in the community. Think broadly here- grocery shopping works!

### **Family Journal due Nov 21**

Family Project Task 1: Describe the family event that you attended with your project family. What opportunities did the family have to address various family functions? (review what they are in Chapter three of the Turnbull text.) Why do they participate in this sort of activity? How do they think the activity could be even more functional for them especially given the needs of their child with a disability? How does their participation relate to how they manage various aspects of the characteristics of their family? Is there any way that school programming could enhance their participation? (For example, are there behavioral demands on the child in question that could be addressed in the IEP?)

Family Project Task 2: Arrange a time to review the activities 1.1 Taking Stock of School and Community Problems and 1.2 What You See Is What you Get in Chapter 1 of Milstein and Henry with your project family.

### **Family Journal due Nov 28**

Task 1: Report on your project family's response to the activities assigned from the Milstein and Henry reading. How does your project family view the community in which they live? Do they consider themselves well-connected? What does this imply about how collaborations between the school and community take place on behalf of the student in question?

Task 2: Arrange a time to talk to your project family about their experiences throughout this project.

### **Family Journal due Dec 5**

Final Journal Entry-

Task 1: Reflection Questions for Your Project Family

1. Why did you participate in this project? Would you do this with all teachers? Why or why not?
2. If you were given the chance to have an impact on teachers' perspectives about family-professional partnerships, attitudes & views towards families, and how they communicate and work with them, what is the most important thing you would emphasize? How would you get your message across to teachers?
3. Assume your child's teacher is not understanding of family circumstances and does not consider your input because he/she thinks you are not knowledgeable about educational matters. What would you do?
4. If you were told your child's teacher is to visit your home once per month, what would your response be? How do you think this might benefit your child and relationships with the teacher/school?
5. Many families acknowledge the difficulties teachers face due to the lack of time for communication and home visits, as well as the lack of resources. What would you suggest to help change these issues for teachers?

Task 2: Schedule an activity to thank your family for their participation- cooking them dinner, babysitting, etc.

### **Family School Partnership Project Grading Rubric**

The goals of this project are to continue sharing the story of your project family, as well as to develop principles of practice around building partnerships with families. *Two areas are of particular importance—reflections on the improvement of the IEP process, and how the family-school partnership can help address the social, emotional, and behavioral development of students.* Please incorporate these themes in each section of your paper.

Provide thorough support for all of your assertions and avoid cutting and pasting information from your weekly journal entries. Create a fluid narrative that accurately

represents the voice of your family, as well as what you have learned from them, the text, instructor feedback, and outside readings.

**Part 1- 15 points:** Review journal entries and **describe the relationship your project family has/has had with school personnel**. Address **all topics** covered in each week's journal entries (such as family roles, elements of trusting partnerships, evidence of communication, conflict resolution, impressions of referral process, family support, IEP process recollections, friendship/socialization). Reflect on the contents of the IEP you have examined and think about the extent to which it reflects family priorities. Integrate and synthesize this information rather than just repeating your journal entries. Include both your own impressions of the partnerships (your observations and the communication you have read), as well as the voice of the family. Include strengths found in this partnership, as well as challenges the partnership presents. Describe strategies you have seen the professionals and/or family members use to remedy these challenges. Highlight challenges that do not have apparent resolutions.

**Part 2- 15 points:** From the information you have gathered from your project family from the start of the semester, as well as the text and outside readings, **develop a short handbook/handout that could be given to professionals providing instruction in building partnerships with families**. In particular, include strategies for involving families in IEP process. Be sure to think about what the family's priorities for the student are (especially as they relate to the importance of friendship and social/emotional issues.) Include tips from your project family on building trust, effective communication as well as examples from your text and your own experiences. Address questions that professionals should ask families, strategies professionals can employ in an effort to better understand their families (i.e. hearing their story), reasons why this partnership is important, and conflict resolution techniques. Consider cultural, communication, and socialization issues. Do NOT provide merely a list of "how-to's". Support your principles of practice with evidence from your project family, your own experiences, or readings (please cite). You can be creative in format and presentation.

**Part 3- 15 points:** From the information you have gathered from your project family from the start of the semester, as well as the text and outside readings, **develop a short handbook/handout that could be given to family members providing instruction in building partnerships with schools**. In particular, include strategies for involving families in IEP process. Be sure to think about what the family's priorities for the student are (especially as they relate to the importance of friendship and social/emotional issues.) Include tips from your project family and the professionals that work with them on building trust, effective communication as well as examples from your text and your own experiences. Address questions that families should ask professionals, strategies families

can employ in an effort to better understand their professionals, reasons why this partnership is important and conflict resolution techniques. Consider cultural, communication, and socialization issues. Do NOT provide merely a list of “how-to’s”. Support your principles of practice with evidence from your project family, your own experiences, or readings (please cite). You can be creative in format and presentation.

**Part 4- 5 points:** Quality of writing. Minimal grammatical errors and misspellings, as well as creativity and the extent to which you clearly articulate the other person’s point of view.

### **Family Stories Assignment**

1. Review your Family Project Journal notes and the responses you received from your instructor. Use these to compose a draft of the family story. The draft should include what you learned each week from your discussion and visits with the family but it also should integrate and synthesize rather than just repeat your journal response. It is very important that you include both your own impressions of the family (characteristics, interactions, etc.). It is also important that the story include the “voice” of the family. After you have a rough draft of your paper ask your Project Family to review it. (You could make these easier for them by just presenting bulleted main points.) Include a paragraph that describes how the family responded to your initial draft. Make edits as needed. The family story should be a manuscript that you are comfortable sharing with the family.
2. Think about the family story and write a summary of the family’s apparent assets and resources that make it easier for them to address family functions and individual needs of their members. What is it about this family that makes them resilient? What resources make them successful in accomplishing their goals as a family and for their individual members? Think broadly here. Consider the personalities of various members, community and family supports, past experiences of the family etc.
3. Family challenges and needs for support- What areas of their life as a family are especially troublesome to this family? What barriers appear to stand in the way of their accomplishing their goals? What sorts of resources or supports might be viewed (from their perspective) as helpful to them? Think broadly here also. Is time an issue for this family? Do they live in a rural community far from important resources? Are there few children in the neighborhood to help meet children’s socialization needs?

## **Family Stories Grading Rubric**

Family story 20 points-the extent to which the story is well-synthesized and includes a description of each aspect of the family discussed over the past five weeks. High scoring papers will include the “voice” of the family and your own impressions of the family. There will be evidence that the family reviewed the story.

Family assets 10 points- the extent to which a variety of valid family assets are described. You should clearly explain why the asset you describe helps the family address the various family functions and meet the individual needs of its members.

Family challenges and needs for support 10 points- the extent to which you well – describe apparent family challenges and suggest how supports might be provided. These should be compatible with the family’s views (not professional views)

Quality of writing 10 points- the extent to which your paper is well-written with a minimum of grammatical errors or misspellings. This also will reflect your overall creativity and the extent to which you clearly articulate the other person’s point of view.

## **Final Paper**

### **Final Paper: 50 Points**

This project emphasizes your personal experiences in this course. **Please review your progress throughout this class by looking through your vignette and reading responses, as well as your journal entries.**

You have been asked by a building administrator to lead a committee of professionals working on a school-wide improvement plan. One goal of the plan is to improve family-school partnerships. You and your team have been charged with developing an in-service training program, as well as other activities or school policies that will change the climate of your school and classroom, as well as increase parental involvement. Before meeting with your team, you decide to reflect on what you have learned in this course and through your experiences with your project family.

Reflect on the following questions:

**1. Current and Future Practice (15 points)** Think broadly here—many areas of one’s practice were addressed throughout the course.

- What will you do differently in your current classroom practice to improve your partnerships with families?
- **Why** will you do things differently?
- What part of the course (readings, specific vignettes, your project family) informed those changes? (if you are not currently teaching, what practices will you implement when you teach?)

**2. School In-service Training (15 points)**

- What would you do to train teachers to communicate effectively with families?
- What steps would they need to take to establish and maintain trusting relationships with families?
- How would you help them to resolve conflicts?
- What would you teach them to help them to connect families with resources in their community?
- What strategies would you teach the teachers to eliminate power differences in family-professional relationships?
- How would you help teachers to enhance their cultural competence?
- How & why would you involve families in the in-service training?

**3. School Policy and Activities (15 points)**

- What kind of initiatives would you suggest to involve families in the school community? How would you attract the “least involved” families?
- What types of school policies would you review, change, or implement to better family-school partnerships? Provide a rationale.
- How would you involve families in these committee activities (how can you get the family voice to know what policies or activities to implement)?

**Quality of Writing (5 points)**

- Well-written with a minimum of grammatical errors or misspellings; create a fluid narrative (do not simply respond to bulleted questions...create cohesive paragraphs with transitions); the extent to which you clearly articulate your point of view

**Project 3-Community Resources**

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Weekly Forum Prompts**

#### **Milstein & Henry Chapters 6-7 , Due 12/5**

Answer all questions:

1. Use Table 6.3 to describe the community in which you teach in terms of its resilience characteristics.
2. Select one of the suggestions for strategies for improving community resiliency (pp. 109-120) described by Milstein and Henry. Describe how the strategy might apply in your school-community.
3. How are the stages of change described by Milstein and Henry? How might these apply to the strategy you selected in # 2.
4. How do Milstein and Henry describe the various factors that influence change? How might these apply to the strategy you selected? Be specific here. (leadership, facilitation, problem solving, decision making, conflict management, assessment, monitoring and evaluation)

#### **Back Home in Indiana, Due 11/28**

Answer all questions.

1. What lessons did the author learn when she returned to Indiana to visit her former students?



2. What did Penny's story suggest to you about teaching special education students how to advocate for themselves?
3. How did Greg's culture differ from the author's?
4. How did the school curriculum fail to prepare Greg for the life he might lead as an adult?
5. How did Lisa's story illustrate how school "wasn't designed with Lisa in mind"?
6. What do the stories in "Back Home in Indiana" imply about how we might effectively teach students who differ from us?

**Milstein & Henry, Chapter 1-2, Due 11/21**

Answer all questions

1. Complete Exercise 1.4. in Chapter 1.
2. Think about the community you teach in. Describe it in terms of the resiliency factors described on pp. 27-28 in chapter 2.
3. What resiliency factors are apparent in Blakes Run? Use the list on pp. 27-28 to describe them.

**Case of Cassie reading Due 11/14**

Please answer all questions.

1. What sorts of assets were evident in Cassie and her family?

2. How did the relationships between professionals in Cassie's case work to facilitate or interfere with collaboration on her behalf?
3. What aspect of the relationships between professionals in Cassie's story remind you of relationships you have with professionals in your school or community?
4. How does the culture of Cassie's family interfere with collaboration on her behalf?
5. Do you see any similarities between Cassie's story and the story of Toots and Monica?  
How do you think the culture of school and the culture of many families in poverty match? Why might this create barriers to effective collaboration?
6. How do the lessons described in the Case of Cassie apply to your project family? Do you think your family is "well-matched" to the culture of the school? How does this impact effective collaboration?

### **Chapter 10, Due 11/7**

Answer all questions.

1. What are the effects of child poverty described in the text that are evident in your school?
2. What sorts of community resources are available to support families?
3. What sorts of abuse or neglect do you think are most difficult to identify? Why?
- 4 . What are the policies of your school about identifying and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect?

5. How could you work to prevent child abuse and neglect?

### **Chapter 13, Due 10/31**

Answer ALL questions.

1. Given the fact that families are deeply concerned about their students' lack of friends, what sorts of opportunities do you think schools could provide?

2. How is assistive technology used in your school (or in the school of your project family)?

3. Does your school (or the school of your project family) have a homework policy?

What sorts of homework help is available?

4. How do you think your school could improve parent participation in school activities?

5. What types of collaborations between school and community organizations are evident at your school (or the school of your project family)?

6. How could you advocate for systems change?

### **Chapter 12, Due 10/24**

Answer 5 of the following questions.

1. What is the intent of IEP process?

2. How much do you think the intent of the process has been actualized?

3. How does the research on IEP meetings reviewed in the chapter give us cause for concern about Toots and Monica in the vignette?

4. What sorts of advice might you give Toots based on the “tips” on pp.260-261?
5. What are the barriers to collaboration during the IEP process that you have encountered? How might they be overcome?
6. How could IEP meetings be more positive for families?
7. How would you ask Toots about their hopes and dreams for Monica?
8. How could you advocate for systems change?

**Chapters 7, 8, and 9, Due 10/17**

1. What principles do you think are key in building partnerships with families?
2. How do you put the principles in action?
3. Describe a conflict that has developed with a family in your class and what steps you followed to attempt to resolve the conflict. What would you do differently now?
4. What challenges have you faced in building trusting relationships with families? How do you remedy those?

**Chapter 5 and Whitehouse Readings, Due 10/10**

1. Describe the roles that parents of your students have demonstrated in their children's education (i.e. advocate? Recipient of decision?). How do you support/promote those roles?
2. How similar/different is the Well's IEP experience to the meetings you have been involved in? How do you ensure that the parent's voice is heard?

### **Chapter 4 Readings, Due 10/3**

Answer the following questions:

1. What is the life cycle stage of most of the students you work with?
2. How might you assist family members with cycle-specific issues (i.e. shock/grief, sexuality, employment). What other issues may present in this life cycle stage?
3. How do you support families during life cycle transitions?
4. What sorts of life cycle issues did your family of origin have?

### **Chapter 3 Reading, Due 9/26**

Answer five of the following questions:

1. A “dysfunctional” family is a family that is not successful in addressing one of more of the functions families usually perform for its members, Often a family is “dysfunctional” because of stress or a lack of resources. How might the presence of a disability be seen as a stressor that relates to how functional a family is?
2. Which of the family functions do you think disability is most likely to impact? Why?
3. How did your family’ circumstances impact how it performed various functions?
4. How could special education serve as an added stressor to the family in carrying out its various functions?
5. How do current economic conditions in your community impact how a family performs various functions?

6. What might you do to support families in carrying out their functions?
7. What functions tend to be dismissed in your family when stress is added?

### **Chapter 2 Reading, Due 9/19**

Answer 5 of the following questions:

1. What do you think about the assumptions of Family Systems Theory? How important do you think it is for families and teachers to work together? Why?
2. How can we make schools more welcoming to non traditional families (foster parents, gay and lesbian parents, adoptive parents)?
3. What is your experience with the role of each of your parents in your life? What sorts of roles did each take and how do you think it impacted you?
4. How could siblings of individuals with disabilities play a more active role in the partnerships between special educators and families?
5. What role did extended family play in your life? How might they make important contributions to family well-being?
6. What is cohesion in a family? How does it help us understand how to support families?
7. Why is it important for families to strike a balance between high and low adaptability?
8. How can we learn about family interaction styles in ways that will help us form partnerships?

### **Chapter 1 Discussion, Due 9/12**

Answer five of the following questions :

1. How does your family of origin compare to the families described in the vignettes?
2. How would you describe the family culture of your own family of origin?
3. What sorts of life management skills do you think your family of origin often used?
4. How did family characteristics impact how your family interacted with your school?
5. Did your family of origin include a member with a disability? Describe the circumstances. How did it impact the family?
6. Why do you think there is a disproportionate representation of students of minority status in special education?
7. Have you had experience with families who have limited English proficiency? How did you manage to communicate?
8. Why do you think students in special education are more likely to be from families with less education and less income?

### **Eliminating Ableism discussion, Due 9/05**

Respond to five of the following questions on line:

1. Do you think parents need to mourn the arrival of a child with a disability?
2. What does Hehir's description of a "supercrip" suggest to you about how we view disability? Do you think these assumptions impact special education?

3. How does the debate about oralism, ASL and cochlear implants in the deaf community reflect our assumptions about disability?
4. A deaf couple I knew years ago adopted a baby from Guatemala who they were told was born deaf. After he arrived in the states, the baby began talking (at about the same time most infants do.) It turned out that the infant had a hearing impairment that was almost entirely reparable with surgery. The couple was very disappointed and considered NOT having the surgery although they finally did. How would you respond to this family?
5. Hehir makes an important point about the use of full time aids in special education. Do you agree with his concern? Why or why not?
6. Would you agree that significant numbers of students with reading disabilities are receiving inappropriate assistance? Why or why not?
7. What do you think about the participation of students with disabilities in standards-based testing programs? Is there sufficient reason to require their participation in your opinion?
8. What do you think about Hehir's suggestions for ending ableism?



## APPENDIX F

Table 2: Project Family Demographics

| Teacher | Family type          | # of family members              | Type of disability                 | SES, racial background                       | Education level                               | Life cycle                                 | Religious background                              | location     | Reason For selection                |
|---------|----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| Annie   | Married, traditional | 4, mom, dad, <u>son</u> daughter | Down's Syndrome and Autism, severe | White, middle class                          | High school                                   | Kindergarten and elementary                | Christian, Not regular churchgoers                | Richmond, IN | Knew the mother through a colleague |
| Amy     | Married, traditional | 4, mom, dad, <u>son</u> , son    | Autism                             | White, Middle class<br><br>Dada is a teacher | College<br><br>And high school(stay home mom) | Kindergarten<br><br>And early childhood(2) | Devout Christian<br><br>Attended church regularly | Spencer IN   | The father is a colleague           |
| Barb    | Single mom           | Mom, daughter, <u>son</u>        | Dyslexia<br><br>And EBD            | Hispanic origin but raised in white middle   | Mom is a college graduate                     | Adolescent                                 | Not indicated but once mentioned that they        | California   | Teacher's sister                    |

|               |                                                                                                |                                                                        |                        |                                                            |                                                            |                        |                                                                                                                                    |                        |                                                             |
|---------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
|               |                                                                                                |                                                                        |                        | class,<br>Low<br>SES                                       |                                                            |                        | do get<br>suppo<br>rt<br>from<br>churc<br>h                                                                                        |                        |                                                             |
| Chri<br>s     | Marri<br>ed,<br>typica<br>l                                                                    | Mom,<br>dad,<br>son,<br>son,<br>and<br><b><u>daught<br/>er</u></b>     | Down's<br>syndrom<br>e | White,<br>Middl<br>e class                                 | Both<br>parent<br>s<br>colleg<br>e<br>gradu<br>ates        | adoles<br>cent         | Christ<br>ian<br>with<br>strong<br>influe<br>nce on<br>their<br>lives,<br>believ<br>e they<br>are<br>chose<br>n for<br>the<br>task | Indiana                | Dad<br>is<br>Teach<br>ers'<br>collea<br>gue                 |
| Char<br>lotte | Marri<br>ed,<br>dad<br>older<br>than<br>mom<br>and<br>marrie<br>d 4<br>times<br>before<br>this | Dad,<br>mom,<br>daught<br>er, <b><u>son</u></b> ,<br><b><u>son</u></b> | MiMH                   | White,<br>low<br>SES,<br>live on<br>welfar<br>e and<br>SSI | Both<br>parent<br>s are<br>high<br>school<br>gradu<br>ates | Early<br>Childh<br>ood | They<br>believ<br>e in<br>god<br>but<br>don't<br>attend<br>churc<br>h                                                              | Richm<br>ond, IN       | The<br>famil<br>y is<br>on<br>teache<br>r's<br>case<br>load |
| Dust<br>in    | Single<br>mom,<br>dad<br>died                                                                  | Mom,<br><b><u>son</u></b> ,<br>daught<br>er                            | Asperge<br>r's         | White,<br>middl<br>e class                                 | Mom<br>is<br>high<br>school<br>l                           | Adoles<br>cent         | Christ<br>ian,<br>regula<br>r<br>churc                                                                                             | Bloomi<br>ngton,<br>IN | Teach<br>er of<br>record<br>for<br>this                     |

|           |                     |                                                               |                                        |                                 |                                                 |            |                                                                                                                                          |               |                                               |
|-----------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------------|
|           |                     |                                                               |                                        |                                 | graduate                                        |            | h<br>goers                                                                                                                               |               | student                                       |
| Erika     | Married,<br>typical | Mom,<br>dad,<br>son,<br><u>son</u> ,<br>daughter,<br>daughter | Cerebral<br>Palsy                      | White,<br>middle class          | Both<br>parents are<br>college<br>graduates     | Childhood  | Christian,<br>regular<br>church<br>goers                                                                                                 | Columbus, IN  | Met at the church and teacher's mom's student |
| gkar<br>r | Married,<br>typical | Mom,<br>dad,<br><u>son</u> ,<br>son                           | MIMH<br>with<br>seizures               | White,<br>middle class          | Both<br>parents are<br>high school<br>graduates | Adult      | Christian<br>with<br>strong<br>beliefs, do<br>not<br>attend<br>church<br>regularly,<br>religion is a<br>big<br>part of<br>their<br>lives | Kokomo, IN    | The mom is teacher's co-worker                |
| Heather   | Married,<br>typical | Dad,<br>mom,<br><u>son</u> ,<br>daughter                      | ADHD,<br>MIMH,<br>Seizure<br>disorders | White,<br>lower<br>middle class | Both<br>parents are<br>high school<br>graduates | Adolescent | They don't<br>attend<br>church                                                                                                           | Brown Co., IN | Own student                                   |

|        |                  |                                           |                                    |                                           |                                        |            |                                                                                  |               |                                |
|--------|------------------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| Angulo | Married, typical | Dad, mom, <u>son</u> , daughter           | Asperger's and Tourette's Syndrome | White, middle class, both parents working | Both parents are high school graduates | Adolescent | Attended church regularly and see religion as a big part of their lives          | Greentown, IN | Friends of the teacher         |
| Jacie  | Married, typical | Dad, Mom, daughter, <u>daughter</u> , son | Cerebral Palsy                     | White, middle class                       | Both parents are high school graduates | Adolescent | Christian, attend church regularly and see religion as a big part of their lives | Columbus, IN  | Teacher met them at her church |
| Kari   | Married, typical | Dad, mom, son, <u>daughter</u>            | Cerebral Palsy                     | White middle class                        | Both parents are high school graduates | Adolescent | Christian, attend church regularly religion as a big                             | Spencer, IN   | Referred to by a colleague     |

|        |                                                |                                        |                                                 |                                                           |                                                 |           |                                                                                  |                 |                      |
|--------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
|        |                                                |                                        |                                                 |                                                           |                                                 |           | part of their lives                                                              |                 |                      |
| Kathy  | Single mom                                     | Mom, <b><u>daughter</u></b>            | deaf, gradually losing her vision, and autistic | White, Low SES, Mom does not work, mainly live on welfare | Mom is High school graduate                     | Childhood | Christian, attend church regularly and see religion as a big part of their lives | Bloomington, IN | Referred by a friend |
| Lawa   | Traditional, married                           | Dad, Mom, <b><u>Son</u></b> , Daughter | Autism                                          | White middle class                                        | Dad is high school and mom is college graduate  | Childhood | Not spiritual, don't attend church                                               | Elwood, IN      | Own student          |
| Lynsay | Traditional married couple with adopted childr | Dad, mom, son, <b><u>daughter</u></b>  | MIMH with trachea and is tube fed               | White - middle class, both parents work full              | Both parents high school graduates, dad current | Childhood | Very spiritual but don't attend church regularly                                 | Gasport, IN     | Referred by a friend |

|             |                                                                                         |                                                     |                                        |                                                                                                       |                                                                                 |               |                                                                                                   |                         |                                                      |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
|             | en                                                                                      |                                                     |                                        | time                                                                                                  | tly<br>taking<br>colleg<br>e<br>cours<br>es                                     |               |                                                                                                   |                         |                                                      |
| Lori        | Tradit<br>ional<br>marrie<br>d<br>coupl<br>e with<br>two<br>adopt<br>ed<br>childr<br>en | Dad,<br>mom,<br><b><u>son</u></b> ,<br>daught<br>er | Autism                                 | White<br>-<br>middl<br>e class<br>(childr<br>en<br>come<br>from<br>differe<br>nt<br>nation<br>alities | Both<br>parent<br>s<br>colleg<br>e<br>gradu<br>ates                             | Childh<br>ood | Christ<br>ian,<br>not<br>spiritu<br>al,<br>don't<br>depend<br>on<br>organi<br>zed<br>religio<br>n | Indiana<br>polis,<br>IN | Her<br>own<br>stude<br>nt                            |
| Gunt<br>her | Single<br>mom                                                                           | Mom,<br><b><u>son</u></b> ,<br>son,<br>daught<br>er | HDHD<br>and<br>blood<br>conditio<br>ns | White,<br>low<br>SES,<br>mainl<br>y live<br>on<br>welfar<br>e                                         | Mom<br>is<br>curren<br>tly<br>taking<br>collag<br>e<br>cours<br>es              | Childh<br>ood | Christ<br>ian,<br>attend<br>churc<br>h<br>regula<br>rly                                           | Kokom<br>o, IN          | Knew<br>the<br>famil<br>y in<br>the<br>comm<br>unity |
| Mitc<br>h   | Marri<br>ed,<br>traditi<br>onal                                                         | Dad,<br>mom,<br>son,<br><b><u>son</u></b> ,<br>son  | Autism                                 | White<br>-<br>middl<br>e class                                                                        | Mom<br>is<br>high<br>school<br>gradu<br>ate,<br>dad is<br>taking<br>collag<br>e | Childh<br>ood | Christ<br>ian<br>but do<br>not<br>attend<br>churc<br>h<br>regula<br>rly<br>due to<br>their        | Bloomi<br>ngton,<br>IN  | Referr<br>ed by<br>a<br>friend                       |

|           |                                                                                    |                                                                                  |                                         |                                     |                                                         |                |                                                                                      |                        |                                        |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------|
|           |                                                                                    |                                                                                  |                                         |                                     | cours<br>es                                             |                | busy<br>lives                                                                        |                        |                                        |
| Mik<br>e  | Single<br>mom<br><br>Dad<br>visits<br>and<br>takes<br>the<br>kids<br>somet<br>imes | Mom,<br><b><u>daught<br/>er</u></b><br>son                                       | LD and<br>commun<br>ication<br>disorder | White,<br>low<br>SES                | Mom<br>is<br>high<br>school<br>gradu<br>ate             | Adoles<br>cent | Christ<br>ian,<br>attend<br>churc<br>h and<br>values<br>spiritu<br>al<br>suppo<br>rt | Nashvil<br>le, IN      | Own<br>stude<br>nt                     |
| Nick      | Tradit<br>ional<br>marrie<br>d<br>coupl<br>e                                       | Dad,<br>Mom,<br>son,<br>son,<br>daught<br>er,<br><br><b><u>daught<br/>er</u></b> | Down<br>Syndro<br>me                    | White,<br>upper<br>middl<br>e class | Both<br>parent<br>s are<br>colleg<br>e<br>gradu<br>ates | Childh<br>ood  | Christ<br>ian,<br>spiritu<br>al , do<br>not<br>attend<br>churc<br>h<br>regula<br>rly | Bloomi<br>ngton,<br>IN | Referr<br>ed by<br>a<br>collea<br>gue  |
| Gina      | Tradit<br>ional<br>marrie<br>d<br>coupl<br>e                                       | Dad,<br>mom,<br><b><u>son</u></b>                                                | Asperge<br>r's                          | White,<br>upper<br>middl<br>e class | Both<br>parent<br>s<br>colleg<br>e<br>gradu<br>ates     | Adulth<br>ood  | Christ<br>ian,<br>do not<br>rely<br>on<br>religio<br>n                               | Bloomi<br>ngton,<br>IN | Sugge<br>sted<br>by a<br>collea<br>gue |
| Sara<br>h | Tradit<br>ional<br>marrie<br>d<br>coupl<br>e                                       | Dad,<br>mom,<br><b><u>son</u></b>                                                | Autism                                  | White,<br>upper<br>middl<br>e class | Dad<br>is a<br>profes<br>sor,<br>mom<br>is a<br>teache  | Adoles<br>cent | Jewis<br>h,<br>very<br>spiritu<br>al                                                 | Bloomi<br>ngton,<br>IN | Famil<br>y<br>friend                   |

|        |                                       |                                                                                    |                           |                           |                                    |            |                                                    |                 |                         |
|--------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
|        |                                       |                                                                                    |                           |                           | r                                  |            |                                                    |                 |                         |
| Shonda | Traditional married couple            | Dad, mom, son, son, <b><u>daughter</u></b>                                         | EBD                       | White, middle class       | Both parents high school graduates | Childhood  | Christian, very spiritual, attend church regularly | Bloomington, IN | Friend                  |
| Lewis  | Traditional married couple            | Dad, mom, daughter, <b><u>son</u></b>                                              | LD                        | White, middle class       | Both parents high school graduates | Childhood  | Christian, very spiritual, attend church regularly | Richmond, IN    | Student                 |
| Shawn  | Traditional married couple            | Dad, mom, son, son, daughter, <b><u>son</u></b> , son                              | EBD                       | White, lower middle class | Both parents high school graduates | Adolescent | Christian, very spiritual, attend church regularly | Spencer, IN     | Referred by a colleague |
| York   | Traditional married couple with adopt | Dad, mom, Daughter, <b><u>son</u></b> , <b><u>son</u></b> , <b><u>daughter</u></b> | Shaken baby syndrome, EDD | White, lower middle class | Both parents high school gradu     | Childhood  | Christian, spiritual, do not attend church         | Bloomington, In | Referred by a colleague |



|            |                                              |                                                                                |                                |                                     |                                                                    |               |                                                                                                                       |                         |                                             |
|------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
|            | ed<br>childr<br>en                           | <b>er</b> , son                                                                |                                |                                     | ates                                                               |               | h<br>regula<br>rly                                                                                                    |                         |                                             |
| Andr<br>ew | Tradit<br>ional<br>marrie<br>d<br>coupl<br>e | Dad,<br>mom,<br>son,<br><b><u>son</u></b>                                      | PDD                            | White,<br>middl<br>e class          | Both<br>parent<br>s high<br>school<br>gradu<br>ates                | Adulth<br>ood | Very<br>spiritu<br>al,<br>religio<br>n<br>plays<br>an<br>import<br>ant<br>role in<br>family<br>life                   | Indiana<br>polis,<br>IN | Dad<br>is<br>teache<br>r's<br>collea<br>gue |
| Ada<br>m   | Tradit<br>ional<br>marrie<br>d<br>coupl<br>e | Dad,<br>mom,<br>son,<br><b><u>son</u></b> ,<br>son ,<br>son                    | ADHD                           | White,<br>lower<br>middl<br>e class | Dad<br>high<br>school,<br>mom<br>colleg<br>e<br>gradu<br>ates      | Childh<br>ood | Christ<br>ian,<br>very<br>spiritu<br>al,<br>religio<br>n<br>plays<br>an<br>import<br>ant<br>role in<br>family<br>life | Bloomi<br>ngton,<br>In  | Stude<br>nt                                 |
| Broo<br>k  | Tradit<br>ional<br>marrie<br>d<br>coupl<br>e | Dad,<br>mom,<br>daught<br>er,<br><b><u>daught<br/>er</u></b> ,<br>daught<br>er | Asperge<br>r's<br>Syndro<br>me | White,<br>upper<br>middl<br>e class | Dad<br>colleg<br>e<br>profes<br>sor,<br>mom<br>is a<br>colleg<br>e | Childh<br>ood | Christ<br>ian,<br>not<br>very<br>spiritu<br>al                                                                        | Bloomi<br>ngton,<br>In  | A<br>friend<br>of<br>teache<br>r's          |

|          |                                                          |                                                 |                       |                           |                                              |            |                                                            |                 |                                      |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
|          |                                                          |                                                 |                       |                           | graduate                                     |            |                                                            |                 |                                      |
| Carrie   | Traditional married couple with an adopted child         | Dad, mom, <b><u>son</u></b>                     | Asperger's Syndrome   | White, middle class       | Both parents high school graduates           | Childhood  | Christian, religion plays an important role in family life | Bloomington, IN | Mother is a colleague of the teacher |
| Christal | Married couple with children from mom's earlier marriage | Stepdad, mom, son, daughter, <b><u>son</u></b>  | EBD                   | White, middle class       | Stepdad high school, mom is college graduate | Childhood  | Christian, religion plays an important role in family life | Richmond, IN    | Mother is a friend                   |
| Beth     | Married traditional couple                               | Mom, dad, son, daughter, <b><u>daughter</u></b> | Prader-Willi syndrome | White, lower middle class | Both parents high school graduates           | Adolescent | Christian, religion plays an important role in family life | Kokomo, IN      | Student                              |
| Gres     | Married                                                  | Dad, mom,                                       | LD                    | White, lower              | Both parent                                  | Adoles     | Christian,                                                 | Richm           | Stude                                |

|            |                                              |                                                                          |              |                                     |                                                     |                |                                                                                             |                   |             |
|------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| sma        | traditi<br>onal<br>coupl<br>e                | <b><u>daught<br/>er</u></b>                                              |              | middl<br>e class                    | s high<br>school<br>gradu<br>ates                   | cent           | religio<br>n<br>plays<br>an<br>impor<br>tant<br>role in<br>family<br>life                   | ond, IN           | nt          |
| Holl<br>en | Marri<br>ed<br>traditi<br>onal<br>coupl<br>e | Dad,<br>mom,<br>stepda<br>ughter,<br>son,<br><b><u>daught<br/>er</u></b> | MMR          | White,<br>middl<br>e class          | Both<br>parent<br>s high<br>school<br>gradu<br>ates | Childh<br>ood  | Christ<br>ian,<br>religio<br>n does<br>not<br>impac<br>t the<br>family<br>cultur<br>e       | Richm<br>ond, IN  | Stude<br>nt |
| Jaso<br>n  | Marri<br>ed<br>traditi<br>onal<br>coupl<br>e | Stepda<br>d,<br>mom,<br>daught<br>er, <b><u>son</u></b>                  | Dyslexi<br>a | White,<br>upper<br>middl<br>e class | Both<br>parent<br>s high<br>school<br>gradu<br>ates | Adoles<br>cent | Christ<br>ian,<br>religio<br>n<br>plays<br>an<br>impor<br>tant<br>role in<br>family<br>life | Nashvil<br>le, IN | Stude<br>nt |
| Jeff       | Marri<br>ed<br>traditi<br>onal<br>coupl<br>e | Dad,<br>mom,<br>son,<br>daught<br>er, <b><u>son</u></b>                  | EBD          | White,<br>middl<br>e class          | Both<br>parent<br>s high<br>school<br>gradu<br>ates | Adoles<br>cent | Christ<br>ian,<br>religio<br>n<br>plays<br>an<br>impor<br>tant                              | Nashvil<br>le, IN | Stude<br>nt |

|         |                                              |                                     |            |                           |                                |                 |                                                            |                  |                            |
|---------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
|         |                                              |                                     |            |                           |                                |                 | role in family life                                        |                  |                            |
| Weissin | Married traditional family (dad passed away) | Mom, son, <u>son</u> , daughter     | LD         | White, middle class       | Both parents college graduates | Adulthood       | Christian, religion plays an important role in family life | Richmond, IN     | Family friend              |
| Kim     | Married traditional couple                   | Mom, son, daughter, <u>son</u>      | LD         | White, middle class       | Both parents college graduates | Adolescent      | Christian, religion plays an important role in family life | Martinsville, IN | Mom is teacher's colleague |
| Mecora  | Married traditional couple                   | Dad, mom, son, daughter, <u>son</u> | Autism, MR | White, upper middle class | Both parents college graduates | Early childhood | Christian, religion does not impact the family culture     | Bloomington, IN  | Referred by a colleague    |
| Lori    | Married traditional                          | Dad, mom,                           | Autism     | White, middle             | Both parents high              | Adolescent      | Christian, religion                                        | Nashville, IN    | Referred by a              |

|        |                                  |                                                            |           |                           |                                                |           |                                                                                 |                     |                            |
|--------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
|        | onal<br>couple                   | <u>son</u>                                                 |           | e class                   | school<br>graduates                            |           | n does<br>not<br>impact<br>the<br>family<br>culture                             |                     | colleague                  |
| Layne  | Single<br>mom<br>house<br>hold   | Mom,<br><u>son</u> ,<br>daughter, son                      | MMR       | White,<br>low<br>SES      | Mom<br>high<br>school<br>graduate              | Childhood | Christian,<br>religion<br>plays<br>an<br>important<br>role in<br>family<br>life | Kokomo, IN          | Referred by<br>a<br>friend |
| Dodson | Married<br>traditional<br>couple | Dad,<br>mom,<br>son,<br><u>son</u>                         | EBD       | White,<br>middle<br>class | Both<br>parents<br>high<br>school<br>graduates | Childhood | Christian,<br>religion<br>plays<br>an<br>important<br>role in<br>family<br>life | Richmond, IN        | Referred by a<br>colleague |
| Marge  | Married<br>traditional<br>couple | Dad,<br>mom,<br>daughter,<br>daughter, <u>son</u> ,<br>son | Blindness | White,<br>middle<br>class | Both<br>parents<br>high<br>school<br>graduates | Childhood | Christian,<br>religion<br>plays<br>an<br>important<br>role in                   | Indianapolis,<br>IN | Own<br>student             |

|          |                            |                                                  |                                            |                           |                                    |            |                                                            |                 |                   |
|----------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
|          |                            |                                                  |                                            |                           |                                    |            | family life                                                |                 |                   |
| Michelle | Married traditional couple | Dad, mom, son, <b><u>daughter</u></b> , daughter | LD                                         | White, middle class       | Both parents high school graduates | Adolescent | Christian, religion plays an important role in family life | Spencer, IN     | Family friend     |
| Margaret | Married traditional couple | Stepdad, mom, <b><u>daughter</u></b>             | EBD                                        | White, lower middle class | Both parents high school graduates | Childhood  | Christian, religion plays an important role in family life | Richmond, IN    | Own student       |
| Nicole   | Married traditional couple | Dad, mom, son, daughter, son, <b><u>son</u></b>  | Severe cognitive and physical disabilities | White, upper middle class | Both parents college graduates     | Adolescent | Christian, religion plays an important role in family life | Bloomington, IN | Friends of family |
| Ron      | Married traditional        | Dad, stepmom,                                    | LD, ADD                                    | White, middle             | Both parents high                  | Childhood  | Christian, religion                                        | Greenwood,      | Referred by a     |

|       |                                  |                                                                |                   |                                 |                                                       |            |                                                                              |                     |                |
|-------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
|       | onal<br>couple                   | daughter, <u>son</u>                                           |                   | e class                         | school<br>graduates                                   |            | n plays<br>an important<br>role in<br>family<br>life                         | IN                  | colleague      |
| Seth  | Married<br>traditional<br>couple | Stepdad,<br>mom,<br>daughter,<br>daughter, <u>son</u> ,<br>son | HDHD              | White,<br>middle class          | Mom<br>high school<br>and dad<br>college<br>graduates | Adolescent | Christian,<br>religion<br>plays an<br>important<br>role in<br>family<br>life | Indianapolis,<br>IN | Own<br>student |
| Shane | Married<br>traditional<br>couple | Dad,<br>mom,<br><u>daughter</u>                                | Cerebral<br>Palsy | White,<br>upper<br>middle class | Both<br>parents<br>college<br>graduates               | Adolescent | Christian,<br>religion<br>plays an<br>important<br>role in<br>family<br>life | Bloomington,<br>IN  | Colleague      |
| Stacy | Married<br>traditional<br>couple | Dad,<br>mom,<br><u>son</u> ,<br>son                            | Autism            | White,<br>upper<br>middle class | Both<br>parents<br>college<br>graduates               | Childhood  | Christian,<br>religion<br>plays an<br>important                              | Kokomo, IN          | Own<br>student |

|     |                            |                             |               |                           |                                    |            |                                                            |           |               |
|-----|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|
|     |                            |                             |               |                           |                                    |            | role in family life                                        |           |               |
| Tim | Married traditional couple | Dad, mom, <b><u>son</u></b> | Down Syndrome | White, lower middle class | Both parents high school graduates | Adolescent | Christian, religion plays an important role in family life | Peoli, IN | Family friend |



## APPENDIX G

Table 3: Participant Teacher Demographics

| <i>Teacher</i> | Family of origin background                                                                                 | Current position                      | Religious background                                                                | Family type                                          |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Annie</i>   | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates                         | Elementary special ed. teacher        | Christian and Jewish<br><br>Religion had an impact on their values and interactions | Married couple, traditional family                   |
| <i>Amy</i>     | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom has a master's degree and dad is high school graduate | High school special education teacher | Christian<br><br>Religion had great impact on their values and interactions         | Married couple, traditional, rural Midwestern family |
| <i>Barb</i>    | White, upper middle class, Caucasian, English speaking mom and dad college graduates                        | High school special ed. teacher       | Christian<br><br>Religion had great impact on their values and interactions         | Married couple, traditional family                   |

|                  |                                                                                                     |                                                                                    |                                                                           |                                                         |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Chris</i>     | White, middle class,<br>Caucasian,<br>English speaking mom<br>high school and dad college graduates | Middle school LD teacher                                                           | Christian<br><br>Religion had an impact on their values and interactions  | Married couple, traditional, rural<br>Midwestern family |
| <i>Charlotte</i> | White, low SES,<br>Caucasian,<br>English speaking<br><br>mom and dad high school graduates          | Works as a consultant with students K-12                                           | Christian<br><br>religion had an impact on their values and interactions  | Married couple, traditional, rural<br>Midwestern family |
| <i>Dustin</i>    | White, low SES,<br>Caucasian,<br>English speaking<br><br>mom and dad high school graduates          | High school special education teacher                                              | Christian<br><br>religion had an impact on their values and interactions  | Married couple, traditional, rural<br>Midwestern family |
| <i>Erika</i>     | White, middle class,<br>Caucasian,<br>English speaking, mom and dad college graduates               | Swimming coach and doing her student teaching, does not have her own classroom yet | Christian,<br><br>religion had an impact on their values and interactions | Married couple, traditional family                      |
| <i>Gail</i>      | White, low SES,<br>Caucasian,<br>English speaking mom                                               | Elementary general education teacher                                               | Christian,<br><br>religion was central to the family's life               | Married couple, traditional family, grown in a big city |

|                |                                                                                                            |                                                                                             |                                                                |                                                       |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
|                | and dad high school graduates                                                                              |                                                                                             |                                                                |                                                       |
| <i>Heather</i> | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking<br><br>Mom is a high school graduate and dad is a teacher | Works as special education teacher's aide in a local high school                            | Christian but religion is not a huge part of their family life | Married couple, typical Midwestern family             |
| <i>Angulo</i>  | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking<br><br>mom and dad high school graduates                  | Special ed. Teacher for mild disabilities in a high school                                  | Christian, rely heavily on faith                               | Married couple, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Jacie</i>   | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking<br><br>mom and dad*                                       | Does not have a teaching position yet, got her license for elementary and secondary science | Christian<br><br>Religion had an impact on their values        | Married couple, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Kari</i>    | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking<br><br>mom and dad high school graduates                  | Elementary special education teacher                                                        | Christian, rely heavily on faith                               | Married couple, typical traditional Midwestern family |

|                |                                                                                                            |                                                                         |                                                                                              |                                                       |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Kathy</i>   | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking<br><br>mom and dad are                                    | Kindergarten teacher                                                    | Christian (Roman-Catholic), religion had a great impact on their values and interactions     | Married couple, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Lawa</i>    | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking<br><br>mom and dad high school graduates                  | Works as special education teacher for migrant students in her town K-3 | Christian, religion was central to the family's life                                         | Married couple, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Lindsay</i> | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking<br><br>mom college and dad high school graduates          | K-5 Special ed. Teacher                                                 | Christian, rely heavily on faith                                                             | Married couple, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Lori</i>    | White, middle class, Italian origins but all kids were US born, mom and dad college graduate professionals | Elementary special education inclusion teacher                          | Christian, Roman Catholic and religion played huge role in the family functioning and values | Married traditional family                            |

|                |                                                                                        |                                                                                                        |                                                                                     |                                                                                            |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Gunther</i> | White middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, stepmom and dad high school graduates | Teaches at a correctional facility                                                                     | Christian, not regular church goers, religion was not a big part of the family life | Married couple(after mom died father remarried), with huge impact from the extended family |
| <i>Mitch</i>   | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates    | High school special education inclusion and resource room teacher                                      | Christian, religion is huge part of family life                                     | Married typical traditional Midwestern family                                              |
| <i>Michael</i> | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates    | Teaches at a middle school as inclusion teacher                                                        | Christian<br>Religion had an impact on their values                                 | Married typical traditional Midwestern family                                              |
| <i>Nick</i>    | White, lower SES, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates       | Does not have a teaching position yet, getting his master's degree immediately after his undergraduate | Christian-Catholic<br>Not regular church goers                                      | Married, typical Midwestern family                                                         |
| <i>Gina</i>    | White, low SES, Caucasian, English speaking, both parents are high                     | High school special education teacher                                                                  | Christian, religion was not a big part of the family life                           | Married, traditional family, raised in a big city and then moved to                        |

|               |                                                                                                          |                                                                |                                                                         |                                                   |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
|               | school graduates                                                                                         |                                                                |                                                                         | rural town                                        |
| <i>Sarah</i>  | White, upper middle class, Caucasian, both parents college graduates, dad is a professor with PhD        | Works as a special educator in a private program for teenagers | Jewish, religion played an important role in their family life          | Married, traditional family, raised in a big city |
| <i>Shonda</i> | White, middle class, Caucasian, both parents college graduates                                           | Middle school special education inclusion teacher              | Christian, religion played important role in the family life and values | Married, traditional Midwestern family            |
| <i>Lewis</i>  | White, low SES, Caucasian, English speaking, mom has an associate degree and dad is high school graduate | Counselor for students K-6                                     | Christian, religion played important role in the family life and values | Married, traditional Midwestern family            |
| <i>Shaun</i>  | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates                      | Secondary resource teacher and also co-teacher US history      | Christian<br>Religion is not a big part of their lives                  | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family    |
| <i>York</i>   | White, upper middle class,                                                                               | Special ed. Inclusion teacher for 5-6 <sup>th</sup> grades     | Christian, religion played important role in the family life and values | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family    |

|                 |                                                                                     |                                                  |                                                                                      |                                                |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Andrew</i>   | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates | Special ed. Inclusion teacher for primary grades | Christian, religion played important role in the family life and values              | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Adam</i>     | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates | Secondary school resource room teacher           | Christian with some Jewish roots, religion was central in the family life and values | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Brooke</i>   | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, dad and mom high school graduates | Elementary, general education teacher            | Christian, religion played important role in the family life and values              | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Carrie</i>   | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, dad and mom high school graduates | Do not have her own classroom yet                | Christian<br><br>Religion is not a big part of their lives                           | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Chrystal</i> | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, dad and mom high                  | Special education teacher for primary grades     | Christian<br><br>Religion is not a big part of their lives                           | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |

|                |                                                                                                                 |                                                                                    |                                                        |                                                |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
|                | school graduates                                                                                                |                                                                                    |                                                        |                                                |
| <i>Beth</i>    | White, low SES, Caucasian, English speaking, dad died and mom remarried, both parents are high school graduates | Special ed teacher in a middle school self contained class for severe disabilities | Christian, religion is huge part of family life        | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Gressma</i> | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates                             | Middle school special education inclusion teacher                                  | Christian, religion is huge part of family life        | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Hollen</i>  | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, dad and mom high school graduates                             | Kindergarten teacher                                                               | Christian, religion is huge part of family life        | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Jason</i>   | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates                             | Teaches at a high school as an LD teacher                                          | Christian<br>Religion is not a big part of their lives | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |



|                |                                                                                         |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                   |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Jeff</i>    | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates     | High school moderate-severe self contained class teacher                                             | Christian, not regular church goers but religion played important role in the family life and values | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family                                                    |
| <i>Weissin</i> | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates     | High school special education inclusion teacher                                                      | Christian<br><br>Religion is not a big part of their lives                                           | Married typical traditional family                                                                |
| <i>Kim</i>     | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and stepdad high school graduates | Middle School Special education teacher                                                              | Christian, religion is huge part of family life                                                      | Married couple(after mother divorced the biological father), not as traditional in terms of roles |
| <i>Meca</i>    | African-American, low SES, English speaking, mom was not formally educated              | Does not have her own class, getting her master's degree immediately after her undergraduate studies | Christian, religion is huge part of family life                                                      | Single mom household, family includes many others with no blood relation to the family            |
| <i>Lori</i>    | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high                      | school psychologist                                                                                  | Christian, religion is an important part of family life                                              | Married typical traditional family                                                                |

|                 |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                        |                                                            |                                                        |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
|                 | school graduates                                                                                          |                                                                                                        |                                                            |                                                        |
| <i>Layne</i>    | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates                       | Runs a waiver program for students with special needs transitioning into adult life between ages 20-37 | Christian, religion is huge part of family life            | Married typical traditional family                     |
| <i>Dodson</i>   | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates                       | High school special education teacher                                                                  | Christian, rely heavily on faith                           | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family         |
| <i>Marge</i>    | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates                       | Teaches piano privately                                                                                | Christian, relied heavily on faith                         | Married typical traditional family                     |
| <i>Michelle</i> | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, dad is college graduate and mom is high school graduate | 4-6 mild-moderate disabilities special ed. teacher                                                     | Christian<br><br>Religion is not a big part of their lives | Married typical traditional family with some diversity |
| <i>Margeret</i> | White, low SES,                                                                                           | Elementary special                                                                                     | Christian, relied heavily                                  | Married typical traditional                            |

|               |                                                                                             |                                                                         |                                                         |                                                |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
|               | Caucasian, English speaking, both parents*                                                  | education teacher                                                       | on faith                                                | family                                         |
| <i>Nicole</i> | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad college graduates             | Does not have her own classroom yet                                     | Christian, religion is an important part of family life | Married typical traditional family             |
| <i>Ron</i>    | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom high school and dad college graduates | High school inclusion teacher                                           | Christian, relied heavily on faith                      | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Seth</i>   | White, middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates         | Teaches as a special education resource room teacher in a middle school | Christian, religion is huge part of family life         | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Shane</i>  | White, lower middle class, Caucasian, English speaking, mom and dad high school graduates   | Teaches a self contained ED class at a middle school                    | Christian, religion is huge part of family life         | Married, typical traditional Midwestern family |
| <i>Stacey</i> | White, middle class,                                                                        | Does not have her own                                                   | Christian, religion is huge                             | Married, typical traditional                   |

|            |                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                             |                                                                  |                                                                                                    |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|            | Caucasian,<br>English<br>speaking, mom<br>and dad high<br>school<br>graduates                            | classroom yet                                                                                                               | part of family<br>life                                           | Midwestern<br>family                                                                               |
| <i>Tim</i> | White, middle<br>class,<br>Caucasian,<br>English<br>speaking, mom<br>and dad high<br>school<br>graduates | Working at an<br>elementary<br>school as<br>special<br>education<br>teacher for<br>students with<br>behavioral<br>disorders | Christian<br><br>Religion is not<br>a big part of<br>their lives | Parents<br>separated but<br>still shared the<br>responsibilities<br>and interacted<br>with respect |

Curriculum Vtae  
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**Current Position:**

PhD Candidate and Visiting Faculty, Indiana University Bloomington.

Major: Special Education

Minor: Teacher Education

Concentration Areas: Learning Disabilities (Mild Disabilities), Early Childhood Special Education, and Teacher Education.

**Education:**

2003-present Indiana University, Bloomington. Doctoral Student in Special education.

2001-2003 Indiana University, Bloomington. MS in Special Education

1991-1995 Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey. BA, Elementary  
School Teacher with Turkish Literature minor.

## **Collage Teaching Experience:**

2007- 2008 Visiting Faculty, IUB, C&I Special Education

Fall 2007, taught two sections of K361 Assitive Technology for Students with Special Needs and Supervised K595, Practicum in Special Education Master's program

Spring 2008, taught 2 sections of K306, Introduction to Special Education for Secondary Education Majors, and supervised K595, Practicum in Special Education Master's Program

Spring 2007 Associate Instructor K595, Practicum in Special Education, Indiana University, Filed Experience of Master's and Certification program students.

Associate Instructor K371, Assessment and Individualized Instruction in Reading and Math.

Fall 2006 Associate Instructor K595, Practicum in Special Education, Indiana University, Filed Experience of Master's and Certification program students.

Summer 2006 Associate Instructor K 525 Survey of Mild Disabilities, Indiana University

Teach graduate students (masters and certification) a web-based course with only two face-to-face meetings.

Spring 2006 Associate Instructor, K371 Assessment and Individualized Instruction in Reading and Math.

Fall 2005 Associate Instructor, K352 Educating Students with Learning Disorders

Summer 2005 Associate Instructor, K525 Survey of Mild Disabilities (face to face on campus). Teach graduate students (masters and certification).

Spring 2005 Associate Instructor, K495- Field Experience Supervisor, Indiana University

Supervise pre-service teachers during their practicum at IPS in Indianapolis, give them feedback about their performance, grade their assignments, attend supervisors meetings, meet the students individually to discuss concerns sand/or progress, and work with the field experience coordinator.

Fall 2004 Associate Instructor, K495-b Field Experience Supervisor, Indiana University

Supervise pre-service teachers during their practicum at Monroe County Public Schools in Bloomington through their field experience in special education classrooms (self-contained, inclusion, pull-out), give them feedback about their performance, grade their assignments, attend supervisors meetings, meet the students individually to discuss concerns sand/or progress, and work with the field experience coordinator.

Fall 2004 Associate Instructor K405 Community of Teachers Seminar for Special Education, Indiana University

Advise CoT students, assist them with problems they are encountering in the field, Supervise them with their term projects, determine their needs based on where they are in the program and provide them with the needed information and needed support, grade their assignments.

Summer 2004 Associate Instructor K 525 Survey of Mild Disabilities, Indiana University

Teach graduate students (masters and certification) a web-based course with only two face-to-face meetings.

Spring 2004 Associate Instructor K306 Teaching Students with Special Needs in Secondary Classrooms, Indiana University

Teach undergraduate secondary majors

Spring 2004 Teaching Assistant

Assist Dr. Anderson in designing and writing a booklet about mild disabilities and effective instructional strategies, Co-teach K306 (Teaching Students with Special Needs in Secondary Classrooms) with Dr. Anderson to undergraduate students, prepare the materials for the class, grade students' papers.

Fall 2003 Associate Instructor K495 Field Experience Supervisor, Indiana University.

Supervise pre-service teachers in their early field experience, attend supervisors meetings, meet students as a group and individually, grade their assignments.

**Public School Teaching Experience:**

- 1997-1999 Elementary School 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Hatay/Turkey.
- 1996-1997 Special Education Self Contained Classroom Teacher, Karaman/Turkey. Taught students with various disabilities ranging from mild to severe disabilities. Autism, Behavior Disorders, Learning Disabilities, Mild Mental Retardation were disability categories that I had in my classroom.
- 1995- 1996 High School substitute Turkish Literature teacher Karaman/Turkey.
- 1995-1996 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher, Karaman/Turkey.

**Computer Skills:**

**PC:** Word processing programs, power point, excel and some assistive technology programs(Kurzwel 2000). Familiar with Windows 95/98/00/XP.

**Internet:** Well-versed with some web design experience.

**Statistics Programs:** SPSS and SAS.

**Specialized Training:**

- 1995-1996 Special Education Teaching Certification, Karaman/Turkey.
- Nov 1996 Literacy Seminar, Karaman/Turkey.
- Sep 1995 Elementary Science and Interventions Seminar, Karaman/ Turkey.
- Mar 1995 Using Science and Applied Educational Technology Seminar, Canakkale/Turkey.



**Awards and Honors:**

May, 2005     Daisy Jones Fellowship Grant, \$1000 for my dissertation research entitled “Preparing Special Educators for Partnering with Families: Examining Changes in Teacher and Family Perspectives after Planned Contact”

March, 2005   Turkish Educational Ministry, Certificate of Merit for Ph.D. work at Indiana University.

Dec., 2004     Turkish Educational Attaché, New York, Certificate of Appreciation for the contribution to improvement efforts.

April, 2004     Turkish Educational Ministry, Certificate of Merit for Ph.D. work at Indiana University.

May, 2002     Turkish Educational Ministry, Certificate of Merit for master’s degree     work at Indiana University.

2001-Present   Turkish Educational Ministry Full Scholarship for Master’s and PhD studies in the US.

Sep 1999     National Education Hatay Directorship, level promotion for excellence in teaching.

Sep 1998     Turkish Educational Ministry, degree promotion for excellence in teaching.

Sep 1997     National Education Hatay Directorship, level promotion for excellence in teaching.

Sep 1996     National Education Karaman Directorship, level promotion for excellence in teaching.

**Conference Presentations:**

**Sakalli Gumus, S.**(March 24-28, 2008). How Effective Have We Been?: Examining the Impact of a Specifically Designed Curriculum to Prepare Teachers for Partnering With Families. A paper presented at the AERA 2008, New York, NY.

**Sakalli Gumus, S.** (November 9, 2007). Finding the right path to prepare teachers for partnering with families. Teacher Education Division (TED) Conference. TED CEC 2007. Milwaukee, WI

Elder-Hinshaw, R. and **Sakalli Gumus, S.** (November 9, 2007). Special Educators and UDL: Perception and Application in General Education. Teacher Education Division (TED) Conference. TED CEC 2007. Milwaukee, WI

Butera, G., Oz, A., Hinshaw, R., Humphreys, L., Klein, S., Hoffman, E. **Sakalli Gumus, S.**, Smiley, A. D., & Swenson, K. (2005). Preparing Teachers to Partner with Families: Educator, Student, and Family Perspectives. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association. Montreal, Canada. April, 2005

Butera, G., **Sakalli Gumus, S.**, & Oz, A. (April, 2005). Preparing teachers for Family- Professional partnership. A poster presentation at 2005 AERA conference. Montreal, Canada.

Anderson S. & **Sakalli Gumus S.** (March 2005). Experiences of juvenile delinquent adolescent females and implications for education. Paper presented at Indiana Council for Exceptional Children Winter Conference, Indianapolis, IN.

**Sakalli Gumus, S.** (July, 2004). Preparing Secondary Education Majors for Working with Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Settings. Paper presented at European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction - JURE International Conference. Istanbul, Turkey.

***Butera, G., Sakalli Gumus, S., Oz, A., & Smiley, A. (October, 2004). Educators and Parents Revisiting Family-Professional Partnership and Teacher Preparation. Paper presented at Indiana Council for Exceptional Children Conference. Bloomington, IN.***

**Sakalli Gumus, S.** , Butera, G., & Sindors, E. (December, 2004). Family Members' Views About Participating in Personnel Preparation for Parent Partnership. Roundtable presentation at 2004, Council For Exceptional Children Division for Early Childhood Education (DEC) International Conference. Chicago, IL.

#### **In-service Training Sessions:**

August 11, 2005. **Folklore and Children's play activities in Turkey: How children transfer play to school environment?** IUPUI, Columbus.

August 24, 2005. **Designing a classroom environment that is conducive to learning.** Head Start, 1502 W. 15th Street, Bloomington, IN 47404.

September 1, 2005. **Conducting Functional Behavioral Assessment.** Forest Hills Special Education Cooperative Richland Bean-Blossom and Spencer Owen Community Schools, IN.

September 2, 2005. **Managing Problem Behaviors in Classrooms and Functional Behavior Assessment.** Campus Children Center, 10<sup>th</sup> & By Pass, Bloomington, IN.

**Publications:**

Anderson, S.L. & **Sakalli Gumus, S. (2004).** Teachers of Students with Learning and Behavior Problems Share Their Views on Accessing and Utilizing Research. *E-Journal of Teaching and Learning in Diverse Settings, Volume 1, Issue 1.*

Anderson, S. L. & **Gumus, S. S. (2006).** Preparing Preservice Secondary Education Majors to Teach Students with Mild Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms in the United States. *International Journal of Inclusive Education.* DOI: 10.1080/13603110500221693 (26 March 2006)

Anderson, S.L., **Sakalli Gumus, S.** & Edmund B. **(Spring, 2006).** Teacher Behaviors. *Essays in Education.*

**Submitted Manuscripts:**

**Sakalli Gumus, S.,** Humphries, L., & Butera, G.D. **(2005).** Preparing Teachers for Family-Professional Partnership: The Perspective of Families. *Teacher Education and Special Education.*

**Ongoing Research Studies:**

Sakalli Gumus, S. & Anderson, S.L. (2004-ongoing). A Competency Check: Secondary General Education Teachers and Teaching Students with Disabilities.

Sakalli Gumus, S., Ballard, K., & Lucas, M. (2004-ongoing). Parental Involvement and Socioeconomic Background.

**Service:**

K306 Student Representative

CoT Committee

**Professional Organization Memberships:**

AERA- American Research Association

CEC-Council For Exceptional Children

National Center for Learning Disabilities

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