PARENT OPINIONS OF A STRUCTURED FUNCTIONAL CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in School Psychology.

By

Anne Elizabeth Bowen

Director: Dr. Lori Unruh,
Assistant Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology

Committee Members: Dr. Karena Cooper-Duffy, Human Services
Dr. Candace Boan-Lenzo, Psychology

May 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

PARENT OPINIONS OF A STRUCTURED FUNCTIONAL CURRICULUM FOR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

Anne Elizabeth Bowen, M.A.

Western Carolina University (May 2009)

Director: Dr. Lori Unruh

The present study examined parental opinions of a structured functional curriculum for children who have significant intellectual disabilities. Parents from the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District in North Carolina whose children were involved in a new structured functional curriculum were asked to participate in this study and provide their opinion regarding the current curriculum. A significant relationship was found between parent familiarity with the curriculum and overall satisfaction with the program. There were no significant differences in parent opinions based on grade level of child or amount of time their child spent in a general education classroom. Further research is needed in order to obtain more information regarding parent opinions of their child's curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

As of April 1, 2005, the state of North Carolina had 212,752 students ages 3 to 21 that were receiving special education services as identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2005a and North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2005b). Of these students, 787 were identified as having severe to profound mental disabilities, 6,293 were diagnosed with autism, 3,182 were identified as being "trainable mentally disabled", and 1,929 were identified as multi-handicapped. The numbers in these groups indicate that as of 2005, there were potentially 12,000 students in the state of North Carolina that were functioning at a cognitive level much lower than that of their peers and due to this lower level of cognitive ability, required a different type of instruction in school. Despite these large numbers, there is still a lack of clarity and continuity in the education of these children who, for the purposes of this study, will be referred to as children with significant intellectual disabilities.

It was approximately thirty years ago that children identified as having significant intellectual disabilities were given a legal right to an education (Wright & Wright, 1999). There have been many improvements in the education of these students over the years, from changes in legal requirements to adaptations in curriculum approaches. While these changes aim to create a more positive educational experience for children with significant intellectual disabilities, school districts may still lack information regarding the best approach for teaching these students and the question of what these students should be taught remains to be answered by the district (Clark, 1994). Teachers may be left to their

own devices in determining how and what to teach students with significant intellectual disabilities.

However, recent legal developments have led many school districts to look more closely at the education of these students. Changes in federal law now require schools to show that these students are making adequate yearly progress in the areas of language arts, science and math, which means schools have to provide students with significant intellectual disabilities with access to the general education curriculum, an area which was previously not often addressed (Council for Exceptional Children, 2004). Given these new developments, many schools are changing the focus of their curriculum to include more academic skills. However, other schools districts have decided that a focus on functional skills should continue to be an important component of the curriculum for students with significant intellectual disabilities. One school district that is focusing on a functional curriculum is the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District in North Carolina. The present study examines the opinions of parents of children with significant intellectual disabilities in this school district in order to determine the parents' level of satisfaction with the current functional curriculum that their children are receiving.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Legal Requirements Regarding Educational Services

The legal mandates that dictate the requirements for the education of children with significant intellectual disabilities have undergone many changes over the years. Less than fifty years ago, there were no requirements for schools to provide education to children with significant intellectual disabilities. The education of these children began to see progression in 1975 when Public Law 94-142 was passed, and continues to change with the passing of more recent acts, such as No Child Left Behind.

PL 94-142. The education of children with disabilities went through a major change with the passing of Public Law 94-142 in 1975 (Wright & Wright, 1999). Prior to the passage of this law, there were no legal requirements for schools to provide any form of education to children with significant intellectual disabilities. The children with the most severe intellectual disabilities who did attend school typically had no structure to their program (Wright & Wright, 1999). Many states were allowed to keep these children out of school if the administration believed the children would be a disruption to other students in the school or to the teachers. It was not until after a few Supreme court cases were decided in favor of the families of the children (i.e., *PARC v. Commonwealth 334,*1972 and *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia*, 1972) that Congress began to take a closer look at the type of education children with significant intellectual disabilities were receiving. Congress discovered a lack of services being provided to this population. PL 94-142 was passed in November of 1975, and stated that all children have a right to a free and appropriate public education, regardless of disability. The law

also stated that individual states would be held accountable for providing educational services for students with disabilities no matter how severe their disabilities.

IDEA 1997. PL 94-142 underwent multiple revisions over the years. Approximately twenty years later, PL 94-142 saw a major revision with the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to IDEA Statutes and Regulations (n.d.), IDEA 1997 was similar to PL 94-142 in that it is based on the provision that all children with disabilities have the right to access a *free and appropriate public education***.** However, IDEA 1997 added that these students are to be provided with a curriculum that is designed to meet their specific educational needs. This curriculum should prepare students with significant intellectual disabilities for employment and independent living upon completion of formal education (Dymond & Orelove, 2001; IDEA Statutes and Regulations, n.d.). IDEA 1997 was designed to hold all students to high expectations, including students with significant intellectual disabilities (Palmer, Wehmeyer, Gipson, & Agran, 2004).

In addition to requiring an appropriate curriculum for students with significant intellectual disabilities, IDEA 1997 also dictated very specific guidelines for the writing of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). According to the guidelines, an IEP is required to state the child's current level of performance and how the child's disability affects his or her participation and progress in the general education curriculum (Agran, Alper & Wehmeyer, 2002**;** Dymond & Orelove, 2001**;** IDEA Statutes and Regulations, n.d.**;** Palmer et al., 2004**)**. An IEP is also required to include specific, measurable goals (Agran et al., 2002; Dymond & Orelove, 2001; IDEA Statutes and Regulations, n.d.; Palmer et al., 2004**)**. With the writing of IDEA 1997, it also became a requirement that

IEPs clearly state any modifications necessary in order for the child to be a participant in the general education curriculum (Agran et al., 2002; Dymond & Orelove, 2001; Palmer et al., 2004**)**. The 1997 Amendments required that students with significant intellectual disabilities be included in state-wide assessments (Agran et al., 2002; Dymond & Orelove, 2001; Turner, Baldwin, Kleiner, & Kearns, 2000**)** and for there to be any necessary accommodations in order to allow these children to be a part of these assessments (Agran et al**.,** 2002; Dymond & Orelove, 2001; Turner et al., 2000**)**. Such accommodations may include the creation of a form of alternate assessment in order to allow children with significant intellectual disabilities to participate in state-wide assessments (Dymond & Orelove, 2001). Inclusion of students with significant intellectual disabilities in state-wide assessments results in each school district being held accountable for providing an appropriate education for these students.

In addition to providing guidelines for curriculum and IEPs, IDEA 1997 also outlined the specific rights of parents of children with any type of disability in regards to their participation in their child's education. According to IDEA Statues and Regulations (n.d.), IDEA 1997 granted parents a role in the creation of the IEP that gave them as much influence over the information in the IEP as teachers and administrators. It was now required that parents be invited to IEP meetings, and that the IEP meetings be rescheduled if the parent could not attend. IDEA 1997 gave parents access to their child's educational records and required parental consent before conducting an evaluation**.** Parents were also given the right to a due process hearing if they felt their school was not meeting the legal requirements of their child's education. The addition of

these parental rights was another way in which IDEA 1997 sought to ensure that children with disabilities were receiving an appropriate education.

No Child Left Behind. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act was passed in 2002. This legislation was focused on placing more requirements on schools in regards to educational expectations. NCLB requires annual assessments for grades 3 through 8 in the areas of language arts and math for all schools nationwide (Browder & Cooper-Duffy, 2003; Council for Exceptional Children, 2004). The purpose of the annual assessments is to obtain information on student progress in the given academic areas. NCLB creates expectations for all schools to show that the students in their schools are making yearly progress in academics, including students with significant intellectual disabilities. NCLB does allow schools to utilize alternative assessments to measure gains made in the standard academic curriculum for the students with significant intellectual disabilities, and still maintains the expectation that these students will also show yearly progress in the given academic areas. According to the Council for Exceptional Children (2004), including students with significant intellectual disabilities in statewide assessments will likely create increased expectation to provide these students with access to the general education curriculum. It is also likely, then, that the students' IEP goals will become more aligned with the general curriculum content standards.

IDEA 2004. In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was revised and regulations were aligned with the NCLB act. According to IDEA 2004 (n.d.), schools are now required to create IEP goals for children with significant intellectual disabilities that are based on the states' definition of adequate yearly progress. In addition, according to IDEA 2004, IEPs can no longer be written with short-term

objectives. Instead, student's educational outcomes are to be written in specific and measurable long-term goals. This requirement holds true for both academic and functional goals outlined in the IEP. IEPs are now required to outline the specific educational needs of the student and state how the school will provide for those needs. IDEA 2004 continues the mandate that IEPs need to include a statement of the method for measuring the progress of the student and that a general education teacher be present at all IEP meetings.

Proposed changes to North Carolina law. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Exceptional Children's Division (2006), the state is now moving towards using extensions to their standard course of study (the curriculum used in general education classrooms) for students with significant intellectual disabilities. The extensions are designed to not only include the necessary academic instruction, but also provide an ongoing focus on functional skills. These extensions were created to fulfill the requirement of providing access to the general education curriculum to all students, based on NCLB. The purpose of these extensions is to provide teachers with a guide in how to adapt the general education curriculum to the level of their students with significant intellectual disabilities. These extensions of the curriculum are to be done on an individual basis, according to the abilities of each student. The goal of utilizing these extensions is to provide students with the necessary academic instruction in order to meet the provisions of NCLB, while also maintaining instruction in functional skills.

Curriculum Changes Over Time for Students with Significant Intellectual Disabilities

Similar to the changes seen in the legal requirements for the education of students with significant intellectual disabilities, the curriculum provided to these students has also undergone changes over the years. In the beginning, the developmental level of the child was used to determine what was taught (Dymond & Orelove, 2001). More recently, children with significant intellectual disabilities have their chronological age taken into account, as well as their individual needs in order to determine the most appropriate educational approach (Browder, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Flowers, Algozzine, & Karvonen, 2003; Clark, 1994).

Education based on developmental level. With the passing of PL 94-142, schools were required to provide an education for students with significant intellectual disabilities, but there was no guidance in how to teach these students or what to teach them (Williams, 1990). The first attempt at educating these children was to teach them based on their developmental level, without taking into account the chronological age of the student (Dymond & Orelove, 2001). This approach typically utilized a modified version of preschool and elementary curriculums, though the majority of students receiving this instruction exceeded those ages (Browder et al., 2003). The disadvantage that accompanied this approach was that students were receiving lessons that were not age or grade appropriate (Dymond & Orelove, 2001). As school personnel became more aware of this concern, it became obvious that this was not the best educational approach for students with significant intellectual disabilities and that a change was necessary. This change came in the 1980s with the development of the criterion of ultimate functioning.

Criterion of Ultimate Functioning. The criterion of ultimate functioning emphasized that students with significant intellectual disabilities would become productive members of society as adults and the curriculum should be adapted to promote those goals (Dymond & Orelove, 2001**)**. Focus shifted to vocational skills and community based instruction. This approach utilized not only the school as a teaching environment, but also the community (Browder & Spooner, 2006). The goal of the criterion of ultimate functioning was to provide students with significant intellectual disabilities a curriculum that would address not only the students' current needs, but also possible future needs. Learning not only took place in the classroom, but also in the community in order to teach skills that would help the student be included as member of their community. This was the first attempt at providing a more goal directed approach to educating children with significant intellectual disabilities.

Functional Curriculum. The criterion of ultimate functioning was replaced after a number of years with the idea of a functional curriculum. The functional curriculum is an educational plan for children with significant intellectual disabilities that is based on various life skill domains such as social skills, daily living skills and occupational skills (Clark, 1994). The functional curriculum targets the specific needs of each student and designed the child's curriculum around those needs. It not only takes into account the current needs of the student, but also any potential future needs. The functional curriculum approach provided more flexibility in deciding the most appropriate skills to teach each student, and the setting in which these skills would be taught. This approach utilized age appropriate materials, as opposed to materials based on the student's developmental level (Dymond & Orelove, 2001). Although the functional curriculum

provided educators with some curricular guidelines, they were still not provided with information regarding what was considered functionally relevant for each child.

Self-Contained vs. General Education Placement

Not only has there been disagreement regarding the curriculum for students with significant intellectual disabilities, but there has also been disagreement concerning the most appropriate classroom placement for these students. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (n.d.), children with significant intellectual disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive environment, meaning they should be included in a general education classroom as much as possible. However, it also states that this inclusion in a general education classroom can be adapted based upon the severity of the child's disability. Children who cannot receive a satisfactory education in a general education classroom due to their specific needs can receive their education in another setting.

A review of IDEA 2004 reveals that there are no specific guidelines for determining the severity of the disability and whether the child can receive an adequate education in a general education setting (Individuals with Disabilities Act 2004, n.d.), so schools are left to make this decision on their own. Therefore, some schools may include the students more in the general education classroom, while others may place the students in a self-contained classroom. Students might also receive part of their education in a community setting. There are multiple placement options for these students, but very little guidance for teachers and schools to decide on the best placement.

Recent Curriculum Recommendations

The issue regarding which curriculum is best for educating students with significant intellectual disabilities has resurfaced in reaction to recent changes in law. North Carolina, for example, has created extensions to the standard course of study in order to guide schools in providing students with significant intellectual disabilities access to the general education curriculum (North Carolina Department of Instruction, Exceptional Children's Division, 2006). (The general education curriculum, also known as the academic curriculum, typically consists of lessons in the areas of math, science, language arts and social studies.) However, these extensions are to be used as a reference, and schools in North Carolina are not required to use them. On the other hand, many schools utilize a functional curriculum approach for their students with significant intellectual disabilities. The functional curriculum approach provides education in the areas of daily living (also known as adaptive skills) – personal hygiene, money management, social skills, vocational, independent living, vocational training, etc (Wehman & Kregel, 1997), as opposed to an academic focused curriculum.

However, with the passing of NCLB, there has been a recent push towards teaching students with significant intellectual disabilities based more on the general education curriculum, with less focus on functional skills (Council for Exceptional Children, 2004). Research has been conducted regarding how the inclusion of students with significant intellectual disabilities in general education classrooms may have a positive influence on social skills for those students (Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995), but there has been very little research regarding how a general education placement influences the curriculum taught to these children.

In a study by Logan and Malone (1998), it was found that students with significant intellectual disabilities included in a general education classroom received less academic instruction than their peers without disabilities. These students also received more individualized instruction in functional skills than their peers without disabilities. Another study found that students with significant intellectual disabilities placed in a general education classroom were perceived by teachers as showing an improvement in their functional skills as well as an increase in their independence (Janney et al, 1995). The teachers in this study also stated they felt there were social benefits not just for the student with disabilities, but also for the students without disabilities in the classroom. While both of these studies comment on some aspects of a student with significant intellectual disabilities being in a general education classroom, neither specifically addresses the question of what type of curriculum these students are receiving. Including a student with significant intellectual disabilities in a general education classroom does not necessarily mean the student is being taught the general education curriculum.

Differing Perceptions on Educational Needs of Children with Significant Intellectual Disabilities

While recent legal requirements and curriculum updates have given more structure to the education of students with significant intellectual disabilities, there are still differences of opinion amongst educational professionals and parents as to what the educational needs of these students are. The available research in this area has yielded inconsistent results. This variability in outcomes lends support to the idea that some question still remains regarding the most appropriate educational approach for these students.

Teacher and administrator perspectives. While there has been limited research regarding the best curriculum for students with significant intellectual disabilities, some research has examined the opinion of professionals in the education field on the best practices for determining the most appropriate placement and curriculum for students with significant intellectual disabilities. Agran et al. (2002) asked special education teachers what they thought about how students with significant intellectual disabilities were being educated. They found that many special education teachers did not believe the general education curriculum was appropriate for these students and that these students should not be expected to maintain the same standards as the general education students. This study also found many special education teachers reported that they were not making attempts to provide the general curriculum for students with disabilities. Half of the teachers in this study felt the district they belonged to did not provide them with clear plans concerning how to include the students in the general curriculum and also felt that there was great resistance from the general education teachers and administrators in regards to including these students in the curriculum.

In contrast, a study of teachers and administrators by Williams (1990) found that 58% of general and special education teachers felt the best placement for students with severe intellectual disabilities was in a general education classroom in the local school. Seventy one percent of administrators polled in this study also agreed with that statement. Interestingly, this study found that more general education teachers (92%) and administrators (95%) supported a general education placement for these students than did special education teachers (84%). This study also found that overall, general education teachers and principals expressed an interest in being more involved in the IEP writing

for these students, while special education teachers were not as interested in having them involved.

A study that examined general education teachers opinions about having a child with a disability become part of their classroom found that the teachers were initially hesitant about the child being in their class (Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004). However, once the child was integrated and the teacher was able to see how his or her classroom responded, both the teacher and the child's family regarded the placement as a positive experience. Another study yielded similar results, finding that general education teachers who had recently had students with significant intellectual disabilities included in their general education classroom reported being hesitant initially about the change (Janney et al., 1995). However, the teachers overall felt the positive benefits experienced by the students made the effort put forth by the general education teachers worth the effort (Janney et al., 1995).

A study of special education teachers found that they felt they did not have enough time to develop instructional programs for the students with disabilities and make sure that the students met their goals (Ayres, 1994). Another concern expressed by special education teachers of students with disabilities who were placed in general education classrooms was that they believed they did not have adequate time to interact and consult with other team members. This study found that the special education teachers felt that the general education teachers did not want children with disabilities to be included in a "mainstream" classroom. The special education teachers in this study also felt that there was a lack of leadership on the part of the administration concerning the education of these children. Many felt that there were problems with classroom

location, access to community resources, and a general sense that administrators did not support students with disabilities being included in the general education classroom.

As can be seen in the research there seems to be no real consensus among education professionals regarding the most appropriate setting or curriculum for students with disabilities (Agran et al., 2002; Williams, 1990). There are also concerns from both special education and general education teachers about including students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Cross et al., 2004; Janney et al., 1995; Ayres, 1994). While teachers and administrators are important in deciding the most appropriate education for students with significant intellectual disabilities, another group that plays a large role is the parents of the students. Are parent opinions similar to teacher and administrative opinions? Or are there other issues regarding the education of their children that are not addressed by teachers and administrators?

Parent perceptions. Parents play a very important role in the education of their children. Since the passing of PL 94-142, parents have been required members of the IEP team and have equal say in what services are provided in the education of their child. For a child with a moderate to severe intellectual disability, what do the parents feel is the most appropriate setting and curriculum for their child? A study of parents found that all parents who had a child with a severe intellectual disability in a general education placement found it to be a positive experience and planned to keep their child in that environment (Williams, 1990). The same study found that of parents whose children were not currently in a general education setting, 52% would support changing their child's current placement in favor of an inclusive one. Similarly, another study found that parents of children with a diagnosis of Down Syndrome or autism that were placed in

a special education setting reported significantly less levels of satisfaction with their child's educational program than parents of children with Down Syndrome or autism in an early intervention or general education setting (Freeman, Alkin & Kasari, 1999). The study also found that parents of children in a general education setting were least likely to consider changing their child's placement when compared to parents of children in a special education or early intervention setting.

In contrast, another study of parents found that 81% of parents of children with significant intellectual disabilities would choose not to change their child's current placement, regardless of inclusive or self-contained status (Westling, 1997). These parents also rated the functional curriculum areas of vocational, community, and domestic skills as a more preferred educational domain than academic skills. However, the parents rated particular skill areas such as motor skill development, improvements in communication, and improvements in socialization as more preferred than both functional and academic skills. Similarly, another study found that parents of children with significant intellectual disabilities rated functional skills instruction as being more important than academic skills instruction, but rated friendships and social relationship development as higher than both academic and functional skills instruction (Nietupski & Nietupski, 1992).

Another study found that parents who have children with severe disabilities had differing opinions regarding the placement of their child into an inclusive setting (Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001). This study found that parents were more likely to endorse a general education placement if the parents highly valued the socialization of their child, if their child had higher cognitive skills and fewer behavioral problems, and if

the parents had already experienced their child being in a general education environment. Parents of children who had more significant intellectual disabilities and behavioral concerns were less likely to want their child to be a member of a general education classroom. These parents were concerned their child would not be able to benefit from this type of classroom setting due to their disability and that their child would be socially rejected. Those in favor of inclusion believed their child would learn more due to the higher expectations of the general education classroom.

Another study found that parents of children with mild disabilities (such as a learning disability) had more positive opinions of an inclusive educational setting for their child than parents of children with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, who reported less positive opinions (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). This study found that parents of children aged birth through12 years showed more positive views regarding certain aspects of inclusion (teacher ability and teacher/parent support) when compared with parents of older children. In addition, this study found that parents of children who had received special education services for 2 years or less had more positive views about aspects of inclusion (teacher ability and support in the general education classroom) when compared with parents whose children had been receiving services for 5 years or more. Interestingly, the parent group that demonstrated the most support for an inclusive placement was the group of parents that did not know the current educational placement of their child (inclusive vs. self-contained classroom). These parents showed higher levels of support for inclusion than parents of children in either an inclusive or self - contained classroom environment.

Other studies have also found that age of the child may be an important factor in parent views regarding inclusion and parent satisfaction with their child's educational placement. One study that examined parental opinions of children with autism spectrum disorders revealed that parents of children ages 4 to 5 years old reported the highest level of dissatisfaction (27%) with the IEP process in comparison to parents of child aged 6 to 9 (6%), 10 to 14 (20%) and 15 to 18 (17%) (Spann, Kohler & Soenksen, 2003). This study also found that parents of children aged 15 to 18 reported the highest level of moderate satisfaction with the IEP process (83%) compared to parents of children aged 4 to 5 (55%), 6-9 (72%), and 10-14 (80%). In contrast, another study found that parents of children aged 0 to 3 years were significantly more satisfied with their child's current educational program when compared to parents of children aged 14 and up (Freeman, Alkin, & Kasari, 1999). This study also found that parents of children aged 6 to 10 years expressed the highest desire for a change in their child's educational program.

Another study found that parents of children aged 2 to 4 and 5 to 9 were more likely to choose an inclusive placement as ideal for their child with autism or Down Syndrome when compared to parents of children aged 10 to 13 or 14 to 18 (Kasari, Freeman, Bauminger & Alkin, 1999). This study found that, overall; parents of younger children were more likely to favor an inclusive placement for their child than parents of older children.

In a study of parent opinions of inclusion, it was revealed that parents who had an optimistic view of inclusion were more likely to support it (Cross et al., 2004). In this particular study, the parents had a very positive experience with an inclusive setting due at least in part to the openness of the faculty. The teachers and parents had open lines of

communication, and the input from the parents was highly valued. The child was accepted in the classroom for their strengths and weaknesses, and the teacher did not attempt to "fix" the child's disability. It seems in this study, one of the keys to a positive parent attitude was the existence of strong parent and faculty relationships.

While there has been research with parents regarding educational placement of their child with a disability, there is a lack of information on parental opinion regarding the curriculum their child is receiving. It is not readily apparent whether parents whose children receive a curriculum that focuses on functional skills are satisfied with the education that their child is receiving.

Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District's Functional Curriculum Program

According to T. Little (2007), the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District in North Carolina has been through some changes over the years in regards to their choice of curriculum for students with significant intellectual disabilities. Only recently has the district provided the special education teachers with a specific curriculum outlining what the teachers should be covering in the classroom. Prior to the introduction of this curriculum, there was no consistency from one teacher to the next, or one classroom to the next. Many teachers used curriculum guides, but each decided on his or her own what he or she would teach and how he or she would teach within his or her individual classroom.

Starting with a pilot program in the school year 2005-2006, this district is now implementing a much more structured functional curriculum in order to teach their students with significant intellectual disabilities. The program includes all students in the district that have been certified as having an intellectual disability (previously known as

trainable mental disability, educable mental disability and severe/profound mental disability) and/or autism. The purpose of this program is to address the individual functional needs of the students and to provide each teacher of these students with curriculum guidelines so there will be consistency in what is taught from one teacher to the next, from preschool to graduation. The program also set out to provide the parents of these students with a better idea of how their child was progressing within the curriculum from one year to the next.

The curriculum includes three major domains: daily living, communication and occupational exploration/preparation. Each major domain is broken down into five sub-domains. The daily living domain includes self-help/personal care, functional mathematics, safety/health, household management, citizenship and recreation/leisure. The communication domain includes receptive communication, expressive communication, pragmatics, emergent literacy skills and emergent writing skills. The occupational exploration/preparation domain includes prevocational, work habits, vocational assessment, career exploration and transition/placement/follow-up. This educational approach differs from the Standard Course of Study (SCOS) that students in a general education setting are provided with in North Carolina. The SCOS focuses on academic skills in the following areas: art education, English language arts, guidance, healthful living, information/computer skills, mathematics, science, second language studies, social studies and workforce development education (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). Therefore, the students involved in this structured functional curriculum are receiving instruction based more on functional skills, whereas students in

general education settings in North Carolina are receiving instruction in the areas outlined in the SCOS.

In order to monitor the progress of each student across the different domains, an assessment checklist was developed by the school district that included the skills under each domain. Teachers were trained to complete these checklists in order to provide information on the performance of the student in each area.

The pilot program included 13 self-contained classrooms, ranging from elementary to high school. A total of 54 students and 14 teachers participated in this pilot program, which, based on initial teacher response, was deemed successful by the director of the pilot program. Starting with the 2006-2007 school year, all teachers of students with moderate to significant intellectual disabilities in this district were trained and are now participating in this structured functional curriculum. All of the teachers involved with the program, along with the creators of the program, currently meet on a monthly basis in order to discuss the progress of the program, make any necessary revisions, and develop a list of materials necessary to aid teachers in implementing this program within their classroom.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

While the teachers in the Winston-Salem Forsyth School System had been given opportunities to speak openly about their opinions regarding the new functional curriculum, the parents of the children involved in the program had not been given that same opportunity. The purpose of the present study was to examine the opinions of the parents whose children were involved in the implementation of this new curriculum. Parents were asked their opinions on the following aspects of the new functional curriculum: familiarity with curriculum, appropriateness of amount of time their child spends in a general education setting, appropriateness of their child's current IEP goals, appropriateness of their child's current curriculum, appropriateness of amount of information the parents receive regarding their child's progress in academic and functional areas, and parents' overall satisfaction with the curriculum.

The hypotheses developed for this study were based on research that has been conducted on parent opinions regarding the placement of their child with significant intellectual disabilities in an inclusive, general education setting versus. a self-contained, special education setting (Freeman, Alkin & Kasari, 1999; Kasari, Freeman, Bauminger & Alkin, 1999; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Palmer et al., 2001; Spann, Kohler & Soenksen, 2003; Westling, 1997; and Williams, 1990). This research considered overall differences as well as differences across grade levels. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that the students with significant intellectual disabilities who are placed in more inclusive regular education classrooms have a curriculum that focuses more on academic skills while students with significant intellectual disabilities who are placed in more self-

contained special education classroom have a curriculum that focuses more on functional skills. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, it was assumed that parent opinions regarding an inclusive placement would be similar to parent opinions regarding a curriculum that focuses more on academic skills, and parent opinions regarding a self-contained placement would be similar to parent opinions regarding a curriculum that focuses more on functional skills. Also, based on information provided by T. Little (2007) regarding the level of functioning of the children involved in the new functional curriculum, it is assumed that in this school system, these children spend a limited amount of time in an inclusive classroom environment and therefore, have curricula that focus more on functional skills rather than academic skills.

Based on the cited research and stated assumptions of the present study, it was hypothesized that the following relationships would be identified:

1. A significant main effect of grade level on parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of IEP goals was expected. Specifically it was predicted in that parents of children grades 9-12 would rate the IEP goals as being more appropriate than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8.
2. A significant main effect of grade level on parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of the amount of time the child spends in a general education classroom was expected. Specifically, it was predicted in that parents of children in grades 9-12 would rate the amount of time the child spends in a general education classroom as being more appropriate than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8.

3. A significant main effect of grade level on parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of what was being taught was expected. Specifically, it was predicted in that parents of children in grades 9-12 would rate what was being taught was being more appropriate than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8.
4. A significant main effect of grade level on parent reports of level of satisfaction with their child's educational program was expected. Specifically, it was predicted in that parents of children in grades 9-12 would report higher levels of overall satisfaction with their child's educational program than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8.
5. A significant main effect of grade level on parent ratings of satisfaction with the amount of information regarding functional skills was expected. Specifically, it was predicted in that parents of children in grades 9-12 would report lower levels of satisfaction with the amount of information regarding functional skills than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8.
6. A significant main effect of grade level on parent ratings of satisfaction with the amount of information regarding academic skills was expected. Specifically, it was predicted in that parents of children in grades 9-12 would report higher levels of satisfaction with the amount of information regarding academic skills than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8.
7. A significant main effect of amount of time the child spends in the general education classroom on parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of IEP goals was expected. Specifically, it was predicted in that parents of children

that spend the least amount of time per day in the general education classroom (0 to 30 min. & 30 to 45 min.) would rate the IEP goals as being more appropriate than parents whose children spend larger amounts of time in the general education classroom (45 minutes to 1 hour, 1 hour to 2 hours, and more than 2 hours per day).

8. A significant main effect of the amount of time the child spends in a general education classroom on parent ratings regarding what is being taught was expected. Specifically, it was predicted based on amount of time spent in the general education classroom in that parents of children that spend the least amount of time per day in the general education classroom (0 to 30 min. & 30 to 45 min.) would rate what is being taught as being more appropriate than parents whose children spend larger amounts of time in the general education classroom (45 minutes to 1 hour, 1 hour to 2 hours, and more than 2 hours per day).
9. A positive relationship would be found between the familiarity of the parent with their child's curriculum and parent overall satisfaction with their child's educational program such that as the parent familiarity increased, so would their overall satisfaction.

METHODS

Participants

All parents in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District who had children enrolled in a classroom setting where the functional curriculum program was being used were asked to participate in this study. Approximately 21 classrooms used this curriculum during the 2006/2007 school year and the parents of all children in these classrooms were contacted to participate in this study. There were a total of 263 parents contacted, of which 78 (29.7%) responded. The parents were asked to provide demographic data on their child who had participated in this functional curriculum. This information included the grade level of the child, special education category of the child, and the amount of time the child was spending in a general education classroom daily. Of the 78 parents that completed the survey, 0 had a child in preschool, 22 (28.2%) had a child in the Kindergarten to 5^{th} grade range, 20 (25.6%) had a child in the 6^{th} grade to 8^{th} grade range, 34 (43.6%) had a child in the 9^{th} to 12^{th} grade range, and 2 (2.6%) did not provide this information. In regards to the amount of time their child was spending in a general education setting, the survey completed by the parents broke the time down into the following categories: 0-30 minutes per day, 30-45 minutes per day, 45 minutes – 1 hour per day, 1 – 2 hours per day, and 2 hours or more per day. However, when the results were compiled, some groups yielded limited responses, so groups were combined as follows: 0-30 minutes and 30-45 minutes were combined to make the 0-45 minutes group; 45 minutes – 1 hour and 1-2 hours were combined to create the 45 minutes – 2 hours group; and the 2 hours and above remained the same. This new regrouping yielded

the following: 33 (43.2%) of the parents had a child that spends 0 to 45 minutes per day in a general education setting, 25 (32.1%) of the parents had a child that spends 45 minutes to 2 hours per day in a general education setting, 12 (15.4%) of the parents had a child that spends over 2 hours per day in a general education setting, and 8 (10.3%) did not respond. The amount of children that spend 2 hours or more per day in a general education setting totaled 15.4%, which offers support to the previously made assumption of the current study that the children involved in the functional curriculum spend a limited amount of time in a general education classroom daily. Table 1 provides information regarding the grade level of the child and the percent of time the child spends in a general education setting daily.

Table 1

Percent of Students by Grade Level and Amount of Daily Time Spent in a General Education Classroom

Time	K-5	6-8	9-12	Not Reported
0 – 45 min	42.4% (n=14)	30.3% (n=10)	27.2% (n=9)	0.0% (n=0)
45 min – 2 hr	4.0% (n=1)	8.0% (n=2)	88.0% (n=22)	0.0% (n=0)
2 hr and up	33.3% (n=4)	33.3.0% (n=4)	25.0% (n=3)	8.3% (n=1)

Measures

The parents of each child were asked to complete a survey developed by the researcher. They were asked to rate the appropriateness of different aspects of the new functional curriculum and their child's overall educational program using a 5 point Likert scale, with the following rankings: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 =

agree, 5 = strongly agree. The survey also included open-ended questions to provide parents with the opportunity to elaborate on certain questions and provide the school district with additional information in order to more appropriately evaluate the new functional curriculum. The reliability of the survey was measured using the Cronbach Alpha. Results of the Cronbach Alpha indicate that the survey had good reliability, with a coefficient of .92.

Procedures

The first series of surveys were provided to the school district by the researcher, and the district distributed them to the 263 parents whose children were involved with this functional curriculum. The district mailed parents a packet containing the survey and an envelope pre-addressed and stamped that was to be returned to the researcher. The packet also contained a letter explaining the survey to the parents. The letter explained to the parents that the completion of the survey indicated their consent to participate in the current study. The letter also explained the confidential nature of their responses and provided information as to who to contact for more information. Following this distribution of surveys only 44 were completed and returned to the researcher. Due to this low response rate, a second set of surveys was distributed. A colleague of the researcher attended two parent meetings in the schools where the functional curriculum was being used and distributed the survey to the parents. At these meetings, the survey was explained to the parents, and the parents were asked to complete it only if they had a child involved in the functional curriculum and only if they had not already completed the survey that had been sent out earlier. The colleague collected these surveys directly from the parents and sent the completed surveys (34 total) to the researcher. All

information obtained from the parents was kept confidential, and there were no survey questions that would identify a specific parent. In order to ensure there were no significant differences between the parent groups at the first and second administrations, t-tests were run to compare the parent groups on each variable measured. No significant differences were found on any variables, with results as follows: familiarity with curriculum, $t(72)=.997$; appropriateness of time in general education, $t(75)=-.760$; appropriateness of IEP goals, $t(73)=-.597$; appropriateness of what is being taught, $t(72)=-.657$; information on academic skills, $t(74)=-.578$; information on functional skills, $t(74)=.291$; parent satisfaction with the educational program, $t(73)=-.831$.

Data Analysis

Several Analysis of Variances (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine the following: grade level and parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of IEP goals; grade level and parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of the amount of time the child spends in a general education classroom; grade level and parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of what was being taught; and grade level and parent reports of level of satisfaction with their child's educational program. For all the analyses, grade level was the independent variable with three levels: kindergarten through fifth grade, sixth grade through eighth grade, and ninth grade through twelfth grade. There were no children reported to be in the preschool age group, so that group was not included in the analysis.

Several one-way ANOVAs were used to examine the following differences: amount of time the child spends in the general education classroom and parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of IEP goals; amount of time the child spends in a general

education classroom and parent ratings regarding what is being taught; grade level and parent ratings of satisfaction with the amount of information regarding functional skills; and grade level and parent ratings of satisfaction with the amount of information regarding academic skills. For all the analyses, amount of time the child spent in the general education classroom daily was the independent variable with four levels: 0-45 minutes per day, 45 minutes – 2 hours per day, and 2 hours or more per day.

The relationship between familiarity of the parent with their child's curriculum and parent overall satisfaction with their child's educational program was examined using the Spearman's Rho correlation.

RESULTS

Analyses Based on Grade Levels

All grade level differences were examined using one-way ANOVAs. The first hypothesis predicted that there would be a significant main effect of grade level on parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of IEP goals. Specifically, it was predicted that parents of children grades 9-12 would rate their child's IEP goals as being more appropriate than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8. An examination of the effect that grade level of the child had on parent rating regarding the appropriateness of their child's IEP goals revealed a non-significant difference ($F(2, 70)=1.26$, $p=.29$). Parent ratings regarding appropriateness of their child's IEP goals for K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 were not significantly different from each other.

The second hypothesis predicted that there would be a significant main effect of grade level on parent rating regarding the appropriateness of the amount of time their child spends in a general education classroom. Specifically, it was predicted that parents of children grades 9-12 would rate the amount of time the child spends in a general education classroom as being more appropriate than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8. An examination of the effect grade level of the child had on parent rating regarding the appropriateness of the amount of time the child spends in a general education classroom revealed a non-significant difference ($F(2, 68)=1.56$, $p=.21$). Parent ratings regarding appropriateness of the amount of time their child spends in a general education classroom for K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 were not significantly different from each other.

The third hypothesis predicted that there would be a significant main effect of grade level on parent rating regarding the appropriateness of what is being taught. Specifically, it was predicted that parents of children grades 9-12 would rate what is being taught as being more appropriate than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8. An examination of the effect grade level of the child had on parent rating regarding the appropriateness of what is being taught revealed a non-significant difference ($F(2, 69)=1.31$, $p=.28$). Parent ratings regarding appropriateness of what is being taught for K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 were not significantly different from each other.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that there would be a significant main effect of grade level on parent ratings regarding their overall satisfaction with their child's educational program. Specifically, it was predicted that parents of children grades 9-12 would report higher levels of satisfaction than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8. An examination of the effect grade level of the child had on parent rating regarding their overall satisfaction with their child's educational program revealed a non-significant difference ($F(2, 70)=1.43$, $p=.25$). Parent ratings regarding their overall satisfaction with their child's educational program for K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 were not significantly different from each other.

The fifth hypothesis predicted that there would be a significant main effect of grade level on parent rating regarding satisfaction with the amount of information they receive regarding their child's functional skills. Specifically, a significant grade level difference was predicted in that parents of children in grades 9-12 would report lower levels of satisfaction with the amount of information regarding functional skills than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8. An examination of the effect grade level of the

child had on parent rating regarding the amount of information they receive regarding functional skills revealed a non-significant difference ($F(2, 71)=2.52$, $p=.09$). Parent ratings regarding the amount of information they receive regarding functional skills for K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 were not significantly different from each other.

The sixth hypothesis predicted that there would be a significant main effect of grade level on parent rating regarding their satisfaction with the amount of information they receiving regarding academic skills. Specifically, a significant grade level difference was predicted in that parents of children in grades 9-12 would report higher levels of satisfaction with the amount of information regarding academic skills than parents of children in grades K-5 and 6-8. An examination of the effect grade level of the child had on parent rating regarding their satisfaction with the amount of information they receive regarding academic skills revealed a non-significant difference ($F(2, 71)=2.629$, $p=.08$). Parent ratings regarding satisfaction with the amount of information they receive regarding academic skills for K-5, 6-8 and 9-12 were not significantly different from each other.

Analyses Based on Amount of Time Spent in a General Education Setting

All differences regarding amount of time spent in a general education setting were examined using one-way ANOVAs. The first hypothesis regarding the amount of time the child spends in a general education setting predicted that there would be a significant main effect of the amount of time the child spends in the general education classroom on parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of IEP goals. Specifically, a significant difference was predicted in that parents of children that spend the least amount of time in the general education classroom (0-45 minutes a day) would rate the IEP goals as being

more appropriate than parents whose children spend more about of time in the general education classroom (45 minutes – 2 hours a day, and more than 2 hours a day). Parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of IEP goals revealed a non-significant difference ($F(2, 64)=1.03$, $p=.37$). Parent ratings regarding appropriateness of their child's IEP goals for 0-45 minutes a day, 45 minutes – 2 hours a day and 2 hours or more a day were not significantly different from each other.

The second hypothesis regarding the amount of time the child spends in a general education setting predicted that there would be a significant main effect of the amount of time the child spends in a general education classroom on parent ratings regarding what is being taught. Specifically, a significant difference was predicted based on amount of time spent in the general education classroom difference in that parents of children that spend 0-45 minutes a day would rate what is being taught as being more appropriate than parents whose children spend 45 minutes – 2 hours a day, and more than 2 hours a day. Parent ratings regarding the appropriateness of what is being taught revealed a non-significant difference ($F(2, 63)=1.12$, $p=.33$). Parent ratings regarding appropriateness of what is being taught for 0-45 minutes a day, 45 minutes – 2 hours a day and 2 hours or more a day were not significantly different from each other.

Analysis Based on Parent Familiarity with the Functional Curriculum

The Spearman's Rho correlation was used to examine the relationship between parent familiarity with the functional curriculum and their overall satisfaction with their child's educational program. A significant positive correlation of .462 ($p<.01$) was found between parent familiarity with the functional curriculum and parent overall satisfaction, with a coefficient of determination of .213, indicating that 21.34% of the variance of

parents overall satisfaction with their child's educational program is due to the parent's familiarity with the functional curriculum. These results indicate that as parent's familiarity increases, so does their satisfaction with the educational program provided to their child.

DISCUSSION

A possible sampling confound exists within the present study that should be noted when interpreting these results. Data is not available to indicate the total number of children enrolled in the functional curriculum at each grade level, so it is not possible to know what percentage of potential parents is represented in the individual groups examined. The parents that completed the survey may not adequately correspond to the opinions of all of the parents that comprise each grade level group. Due to this potential confound, the findings of the present study should be interpreted with some caution. These results may not generalize to all parents with children in the functional curriculum.

As predicted, a significant positive relationship ($p<.01$) was found between parent familiarity with the functional curriculum and overall parent satisfaction with his/her child's educational program. This finding indicates that the more familiar parents were with the functional curriculum, the more satisfied they were overall with their child's educational program. Since most of these parents had children who were receiving the majority of their education in self-contained special education settings, this would seem to indicate that the parent's satisfaction with that setting is linked to the amount of familiarity that they have with the curriculum. Several studies have documented similar relationships between parents being provided with knowledge regarding their child's educational program and their satisfaction with the services that their children are receiving (Leyser and Kirk, 2004, Cross et al., 2004). This finding has implications for school districts when considering the education of children with significant intellectual disabilities. The more information the school district provides to the parents, the more

likely the parents are to be satisfied with their child's education, which in turn will likely have a positive impact on the relationship between the school and parents.

There were no statistically significant differences in parent opinion found based on the grade level of the child receiving services. While the findings of the present study are non-significant, other research has yielded statistically significant (although inconsistent) results. Some researchers found that parents of older children offer more favorable opinions of their child's education (Spann, Kohler & Soenksen, 2003) while other studies have shown the opposite with parents of younger children showing more favorable opinions (Freeman, Alkin & Kasari, 1999). Since no difference was indicated in this data, it is possible that factors other than age of the child impact parent opinions regarding their child's educational program and more research is needed to identify those factors.

There were no statistically significant differences in parent satisfaction with the amount of information available regarding their child's functional or academic skills found based on the grade level of the child receiving services. Previous studies have found that parents rate functional skills as a more preferred educational area than academic skills (Westling, 1997; Nietupski and Neitupski, 1992), but the current study reveals that the grade level of the child is not a significant factor in parent satisfaction with the information they receive about their child's skills in these areas. It is possible that factors other than grade level of the child impact parent opinions in this area, and further research is needed to examine these factors.

There were no statistically significant differences in parent opinion found based on the amount of time the child spends in a general education classroom. These findings

indicate that parent opinions on what is being taught and the appropriateness of IEP goals do not change regardless of the amount of time their child spends in a regular education setting. Previous research in this area has been inconsistent as well, with some research indicating that parents of children with more significant intellectual disabilities were less likely to report positive views of inclusion (Palmer, Fuller, Arora, and Nelson, 2001; Leyser and Kirk, 2004). Other studies indicate that parents whose child has been included in a general education placement would choose not to change it (Williams, 1990; Westling, 1997), and in one study, more than half the parents would choose to change their child's placement for a more inclusive one (Williams, 1990).

While no significant data was found in this study regarding the effect that the amount of time the child spends in a general education classroom per day and grade level of the child had on parent ratings on certain aspects of the functional curriculum, there is a possible sampling confound that should be considered. It is possible that, due to the low response rate of this survey and the lack of information regarding what percentage of parents at each grade level completed the survey, those parents that provided their opinions do not accurately represent the opinions of all the parents with children in the functional curriculum. If there had been a higher response rate, it is possible that significant results may have been revealed. However, given the lack of research of parent opinions regarding , further examination is necessary to determine what factors may influence parental opinions in this area.

Limitations of the Current Study

There are some limitations to this study that should be taken into consideration when interpreting these results. The response rate to this survey was somewhat low, with

78 of 263 (29.7%) possible parents completing the survey. The responses of these 78 parents may not accurately represent the opinions of all 263 parents with a child involved in the functional curriculum. Parents that responded may be more actively involved in their child's education on a regular basis, and therefore the opinions of parents that are not as actively involved may not have been represented.

Every precaution was taken when administering the second series of surveys during the parent meetings to prevent parents from filling out the survey a second time, however it is impossible to know for sure that this did not occur. Due to the confidential nature of and the method by which parents responded during the first series of surveys, it is impossible to know which parents completed the surveys and which did not. The possibility of a second response from a parent must be noted.

The method of survey administration may have prevented some sub groups of parents from participating. Surveys were only distributed in a written form, so parents with limited reading skills were most likely unable to complete the survey. The survey was only available in English, which may have prevented non-English speaking parents from completing the survey as well. The responses of parents that completed the survey do not necessarily represent all parents in the school district, and so results cannot be generalized to all parents with children in the functional curriculum, nor can they be generalized to other districts that have implemented similar functional curriculums.

As some research has indicated (Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001, Leyser & Kirk, 2004), the severity of the child's disability can be a factor in some parent's opinions regarding their child's educational program. The parents in this study had a child with a significant intellectual disability, which may have had an impact on some results. The

parents that participated in the present study had children identified with the following disabilities: trainable mentally disabled (n=39), severe/profound mental retardation (n=2), multiply handicapped (n=5), autism (n=30), and 2 did not report this information.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study provides a good starting point for future and more in-depth research. There is a paucity of research in this area, as many studies of parents' opinions regarding the education of their child with severe intellectual disabilities look at educational placement, not at the curriculum their child is receiving. More research is needed to see how both child and parent variables beyond grade level and the amount of time the child spends in a general education classroom can affect parent satisfaction with aspects of their child's curriculum. Parent familiarity with the curriculum was a significant factor in this study, and future research can help to show whether this is a consistent factor in parent satisfaction. More research is also needed to see how grade level of the child impacts parental opinion, as this may also be an important factor.

The question of what curriculum to use when teaching students with significant intellectual disabilities is one that still remains to be answered, and further research in this area will only continue to help answer this question. Future studies should focus not on the educational placement of these children, but on the curriculum they are receiving. The more information that is gained, the better these children can be served.

REFERENCES

Agran, M., Alper, S., & Wehmeyer, M. (2002). Access to the general curriculum for students with significant disabilities: What it means to teachers. *Education & Training in Mental Retardation & Developmental Disabilities*, *37*(2), 123-133.

Ayres, B. (1994). Easy for you to say: Teacher perspectives on implementing most promising practices. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, *19*, 84-93.

Browder, D., & Cooper-Duffy, K. (2003). Evidence-based practices for students with significant intellectual disabilities and the requirement for accountability in 'No Child Left Behind'. *Journal of Special Education, 37*(3), 157-163.

Browder, D., Spooner, F., Ahlgrim-Delzell, L., Flowers, C., Algozzine, B., & Karvonen, M. (2003). A Content Analysis of the Curricular Philosophies Reflected in States' Alternate Assessment Performance Indicators. *Research & Practice for Persons with Significant intellectual disabilities, 28(4),* 165-181.

Browder, D. & Spooner, F. (2006). *Teaching Language Arts, Math & Science to Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities.* Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Clark, G. (1994). Is a Functional Curriculum Approach Compatible with an Inclusive Education Model?. *Teaching Exceptional Children, v26*(n2), p36.

Council for Exceptional Children (2004, July 15). *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, A Technical Assistance Resource.* Retrieved March 23, 2007 from http://www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&Template=/search/searchdisplay.cfm

Cross, A., Traub, E., Hutter-Pishgahi, L., & Shelton, G. (2004). Elements of Successful Inclusion for Children with Significant Disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 24*(3), 169-183.

Dymond, S., & Orelove, F. (2001). What Constitutes Effective Curricula for Students with Significant intellectual disabilities? *Exceptionality, 9*(3), 109-122.

Freeman, S. F. N., Alkin, M. C., & Kasari, C. L. (1999). Satisfaction and desire for change in educational placement for children with Down syndrome: Perceptions of parents. *Remedial and Special Education, 20,* 143-151.

IDEA Statute and Regulations. (n.d.) Retrieved February 1, 2007 from http://www.wrightslaw.com/statute.htm

Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004. (n.d.) Retrieved February 2, 2007 from http://www.wrightslaw.com/idea/index.htm

Janney, R., Snell, M., Beers, M., & Raynes, M. (1995). Integrating students with moderate and significant intellectual disabilities into general education classes. *Exceptional Children, 61*(5), 425-439.

Kasari, C., Freeman, S. F. N., Bauminger, N., & Alkin, M. C. (1999). Parental perspectives on inclusion: Effects of autism and Down syndrome. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 29,* 297-305.

Leyser, Y. & Kirk, R. (2004). Evaluating inclusion: an examination of parent views and factors influencing their perspectives. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education, 51(3),* 271-285.

Logan, K., & Malone, D. (1998). Comparing instructional contexts of students with and without significant intellectual disabilities in general education classrooms. *Exceptional Children, 64*(3), 343-358.

Nietupski, S.H. & Nietupski, J. (1992). Functional Life Skills, Academic Skills and Friendship/Social Relationship Development: What Do Parents of Students with Moderate/Severe/Profound Disabilities Value? *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 17(1),* 53-58.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (n.d.) *NC Standard Course of Study, K-12, Introduction.* Retrieved January 11, 2009 from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/introduction

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2005a) *April 1, 2005 Child Count Disability Ethnicity Gender State, 2005* [Data file]. Available from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Web site, http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/ec/data/childcount

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2005b) *April 1, 2005 Preschool Disability Ethnicity, 2005* [Data file]. Available from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Web site, http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/ec/data/childcount

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, Exceptional Children Division. (2006, November). *North Carolina Extended Content Standards*. Retrieved March 23, 2007 from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/ec/

Palmer, D., Fuller, K., Arora, T., & Nelson, M. (2001). Taking sides: Parent views on inclusion for their children with significant intellectual disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 67*(4), 467-484.

Palmer, S.B., Wehmeyer, M.L., Gipson, K. & Agran, M. (2004). Promoting Access to the General Curriculum by Teaching Self-Determination Skills. *Exceptional Children, 70(4),* 427-439.

Spann, S. J., Kohler, F. W., & Soenksen, D. (2003). Examining Parents' Involvement in and Perceptions of Special Education Services: An Interview with Families in a Parent Support Group. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 18,* 228-237.

T. Little (personal communication, February 21, 2007).

Turner, M.D., Baldwin, L., Kleiner, H.L., & Kearns, J.F. (2000). The Relation of a Statewide Alernate Assessment for Students with Significant intellectual disabilities to Other Measures of Instructional Effectiveness. *The Journal of Special Education, 34(2),* 69-76.

Wehman, P., & Kregel, J. (1997). Functional Curriculum for Elementary, Middle, and Secondary Age Students with Special Needs. *PRO-ED, Inc.*

Westling, D. (1997). What parents of young children with mental disabilities want: The views of one community. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 12*(2), 67-78.

Williams, W. (1990). Level of acceptance and implementation of best practices in the education of students with severe handicaps in Vermont. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation, 25,* 120-131.

Wright, P.W.D. & Wright, P.D. (1999). *Wrightslaw: Special Education Law*. [electronic version] US: Harbor House Law Press.

APPENDIX A

Dear Parents,

The Winston-Salem Forsyth School District began using a new, more structured functional curriculum for their students with significant disabilities during the 2006-2007 school year. The purpose of the functional curriculum is to teach students life skills so they can function independently in the home, school, and the community. The curriculum is grouped into four groups: functional literacy (English/Language Arts), functional numeracy (Math), functional transition (prevocational/vocational), and functional life skills (Science and Social Studies).

Your child has been taught using this curriculum since the fall semester of 2006, and the Winston-Salem/Forsyth School District would like to learn your perceptions by having you complete the enclosed survey. The survey should only take a few minutes to complete, and you are encouraged to answer all questions honestly. Please note that:

1. Your participation is completely voluntary.
2. You can decide at any time not to participate. You do not have to complete the survey.
3. Your answers will be kept completely confidential. There is no place for your name on the survey and no one will know how you answered the questions.
4. Turning in the survey indicates that you agree to be a participant in this study.

In order to make sure your responses are kept confidential, please place the completed survey in the self addressed, stamped envelope provided and place it in the mail. Please do not put your name or your child's name anywhere on the envelope or the survey. Your completed survey will be reviewed by a graduate student at Western Carolina University. Once all surveys have been completed and analyzed, the results will be reported back to the Winston-Salem/ Forsyth County School District in order to assist in the ongoing curriculum development process.

Your opinions are important to the school district and your feedback would be greatly appreciated. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the final results of the survey, please contact Dr. Lori Unruh at the following address:

Western Carolina University
311 Killian
Cullowhee, NC 28723
E-mail: lunruh@email.wcu.edu
Phone: (828)227-2738

Sincerely,

Teresa Little
Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School District

Anne Bowen (graduate student)
Western Carolina University Psychology Department

Dr. Lori Unruh (Assistant Professor)
Western Carolina University Psychology Department

APPENDIX B

Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System
Functional Curriculum Parent Survey

Please complete one survey for each child that you have who is receiving special education services in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System.

How familiar are you with the new functional curriculum that was implemented by your child's teacher in the 2006/2007 school year?

Not at all familiar		Somewhat familiar		Very Familiar
1	2	3	4	5

Did your child's teacher or anyone else at your child's school explain the new functional curriculum to you?

Yes No

For the following questions, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the given statement. In addition, on some items if you do not agree with the statement you will have an opportunity to indicate why you do not agree.

1. I feel that the amount of time that my child spends in the general education classroom is appropriate.

Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

If you do not feel the amount of time your child spends in a general education classroom is appropriate, why not?

2. I feel that the goals listed on my child's current IEP appropriately address the skills my child needs to work on.

Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

If you do not feel the IEP goals appropriately address the skills your child needs, why not?

3. I feel that what my child is being taught in school is appropriate.

Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

If you do not feel that what your child is being taught is appropriate, why not?

4. Given the current instruction my child is receiving, I am satisfied with the amount of information I am getting regarding my child's progress on specific **academic skills** (ie math, language arts, science, social studies)

Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

5. Given the current instruction my child is receiving, I am satisfied with the amount of information I am getting regarding my child's progress on specific **functional skills** (ie independent living skills)

Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. I am satisfied with the educational program that my child is receiving.

Strongly Disagree		Neither Agree or Disagree		Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Please provide the following information for demographic purposes:

Grade Level of my child (please mark appropriate level):

_____ PreSchool

_____ Elementary (K-5)

_____ Middle School (6-8)

_____ High School (9-12)

Special Education Category of my child (please mark appropriate category):

_____ Trainable Mentally Disabled (TMD) _____

_____ Severe/Profound

_____ Multi Handicapped

_____ Autism

_____ Other (please specify): _____

How much time does your child spend in a general education classroom per day?

_____ 0 to 30 minutes

_____ over 30 minutes & up to 45min

_____ over 45 minutes & up to1hour

_____ over 1 hour & up to 2 hours

_____ more than 2 hours