

A COMPARISON OF THE ACTUAL AND THE IDEAL INVOLVEMENT
OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS IN PLACEMENT DECISIONS
PERTAINING TO SPECIAL EDUCATION AND
LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

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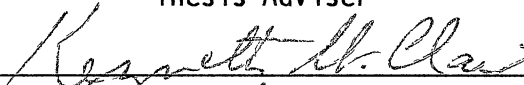
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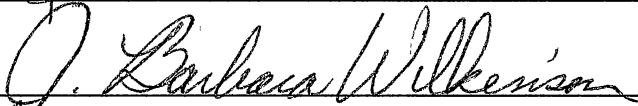
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

If Americans are to believe in the promise of continued educational growth for all citizens, then public school administrators will be held responsible for providing free and appropriate programs for all children (handicapped and regularly placed) within their jurisdiction. These programs must take place within the principle of least restrictive environment (LRE).

When Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Public Law 94-142, it required all public schools to provide special education and related services designed to meet each identified handicapped child's needs in certain mandated placements, while also protecting the child's procedural due process rights. Previously, Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Public Law 93-112, had required that no handicapped individual should be excluded, solely by reason of handicap, from participation in any federally assisted program. More recently, Public Law 99-457 provided for services, from birth, for handicapped children through the use of care managers, Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP), interagency services, and additional federal aid to support such activities.

Through implementation of these laws, special education has been extended to include children such as those who are identified as emotionally disturbed, hearing impaired, learning disabled, mentally handicapped, physically handicapped, and visually impaired. Specialists in

these areas focus upon the responsibilities of state and district policies to meet the handicapped children's needs whereas district administrators focus upon leadership, decision making, and communication as necessary to implement overall improvement in services and programs.

The implementation of these laws had a direct impact upon the total operation and administration of public schools. The task of translating the specific and noncompromising regulations into enhanced programs for eligible handicapped children (without disturbing the balanced learning of regularly placed youngsters) has rested upon public school personnel. For example, one of the most significant aspects of this implementation process has involved the required placement of students in a least restrictive environment (LRE). LRE is defined in Public Law 94-142 as education is the most normal environment that meets the academic, social, and physical needs of students. The term "mainstreaming" was not described in P. L. 94-142 but became a term popularized by educators to describe the "educational situation which gives [the student] the best chance to succeed in life" (Allen, Jason, & McKean, 1982, p. 1). Generally, mainstreaming has come to imply an integration of handicapped learners into regular classrooms. LRE may be conceptualized as a "compromise" between maximum integration and maximum individualization. Mainstreaming and least restrictive environment are thus interrelated and based upon a fundamental belief that handicapped children can benefit from involvement in an educational environment shared with nonhandicapped learners (Corpolongo, 1988).

With the tremendous increase of subdivisions of special education, such as appropriated funding, individualized educational plans (IEPs), direct and related services, paraprofessionals, private school special services, due process, and confidentiality of records, identification of

the LRE has come to be a critical decision which is the responsibility of school personnel. Cochrane and Westling (1977), Gearheart (1977), and Anastasio and Sage (1982) examined administrative expectations and actions and found that identification and placement responsibility led to more involved administrative action. The perceptions by school personnel of the special learners, as well as the roles to which such personnel have been assigned, can affect the decisions relative to the LRE and lead to more effective school involvement in the LRE.

The importance of the involvement of the building principal in the decisions relative to placement of students in the least restrictive environment is determined by both legal and regulatory needs within the special education environment, as well as by the leadership role of the principal. The literature relative to school effectiveness has shown this latter factor to be of great importance to the quality of the educational programs provided for all students within the school building.

Statement of the Problem

For the successful implementation of effective special education programs, beliefs, community actions, and laws must interrelate. To insure quality special education, these aspects must be grounded in the guidelines mandated by P.L. 94-142 and P.L. 99-457. One problem in education is the degree to which building administrators should be involved in the process of determining the needs and competencies of handicapped students and the application of that understanding to effect the most appropriate placement of such students in the least restrictive environment. The premise could be stated that, if the principal is actively involved in decisions relative to LRE, the placement of students will likely result in less disruptive behavior on the part of the student, the

needs of the student will become a more prominent focus by the school staff, students will learn more, students will have a more positive attitude toward learning, and the principal will function as a role model for the student.

Hence, the investigative purpose of this study was to identify the degree of involvement by building administrators in decisions pertaining to the placement of handicapped children within the least restrictive environment. Furthermore, this study was designed to identify the degree to which building administrators would ideally be involved in those decisions and the factors which may cause actual involvement to be different from desired involvement.

Research questions that have focused the study are as follows:

1. What are the activities through which elementary principals are involved in decisions pertaining to the placement of children within the least restrictive environment?
2. To what degree are elementary principals actually involved in those LRE decisions?
3. To what degree would elementary principals ideally want to be involved in those LRE decisions?
4. What factors do elementary principals identify that cause their actual involvement to differ from their ideal involvement?

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to provide information regarding the actual and the ideal degrees of involvement by elementary principals in decisions relative to the placement of students in the least restrictive environment. There has been considerable debate regarding the building level administrators' role in this LRE process. If there is a

significant difference between the actual and the ideal involvement of administrators in these decisions, factors which impact upon that discrepancy may be identified. Identification of similarities and differences among these administrators' perceptions as well as identification of factors that have inhibited the attainment of ideal levels of involvement may contribute to future decisions regarding the appropriate level of involvement of administrators in the establishment of individual education plans (IEPs). Such findings may contribute to modifications in several areas, including the preparation and/or certification of administrators, the procedural responsibilities assigned to building administrators through district policies or administrative regulations, and the legal responsibilities assigned through special education laws and regulations. These changes could enable building administrators to more effectively participate in those decisions relative to the placement of their students in the least restrictive environment.

Limitations of the Study

The applicability of the conclusions of this study may have been limited because of the following:

1. This study was limited to a sample of elementary building principals in independent school districts in the State of Oklahoma.
2. The identification of the actual and the ideal degrees of involvement was based solely upon the reported perceptions of the principals.
3. The instrument used in the data collection was developed specifically for this study. While efforts were made to determine the validity and reliability of this instrument, its use has been limited to this study.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used in this study:

Least Restrictive Environment.

To the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (20 U.S.C. 1412-1414).

All handicapped children [must] be educated with nonhandicapped children to the extent they can benefit from such placement. Local school systems are encouraged to develop their programs around the needs--not force students into rigid program molds. Emphasis is given to placement in a program designed to assure maximum development with minimum failure (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1988b, p. 15).

Elementary Principal. An individual building administrator with primary responsibility for the administration of a school attendance center which includes two or more of the grades K-5 and no regularly placed students above grade six.

Mainstreaming.

As in LRE, the maximum extent appropriate for handicapped learners provides a "continuum of alternative placements to meet the needs of individuals in special education and related services. This continuum of related services . . . is not synonymous with full-time regular classroom instruction (sometimes referred to as mainstreaming)" (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1988b, p. 16).

Individual Education Plan (IEP).

A written educational program that has been developed for the child's specified educational needs and implemented in accordance with federal and state guidelines in compliance with the laws for the handicapped (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1988b, p. 8).

Summary

When the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142)

was passed in 1975, the legal basis for identification and placement of special students was established. One of the manifestations of the law was the mandated determination of each student's least restrictive environment as identified within an IEP. The case-by-case management of these IEPs remains a team effort involving the student, the parent or guardian, the regular classroom teacher(s), the psychometrist and/or counselor, and the special education teacher. Of critical importance has been the involvement of building administrators whose decisions and actions involve proper allegiance to the legal aspects of the student's education. The problem that is being addressed in this study is the identification and comparison of the actual and the ideal involvement of elementary principals in these actions pertaining to the decisions regarding placement of students in the least restrictive environment.

Chapter II contains an examination of related research and professional literature concerning the role of the building principals in the administration of effective elementary schools, the legal and regulatory environment surrounding decisions related to placement of students in the least restrictive environment, and the manner in which the role and the environment interact. A description of the research procedures employed in this study is the focus of Chapter III. Chapter IV contains an analysis of the data. The summary, conclusions, recommendations, and commentary are presented in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The investigative purpose of this study was to identify the degree of actual and ideal involvement of elementary principals in the placement decisions regarding handicapped children. Data were collected to identify factors that may cause actual involvement to differ from ideal involvement.

This chapter includes a review of the historical and current literature regarding the administration of special education. The first section contains a review of the historical development of special education mandates. A second segment of the chapter focuses on the issue relative to the concept of least restrictive environment. The final portion contains a review relating the special education mandates to the role of the school administrator.

Historical Issues in Special Education

The history of special education is frequently focused on the constitutional rights, societal influences, and governmental mandates which have been the mechanisms of change. While change, indeed, became the distinctive trademark of special education in the 1970s, exclusion had previously been the key word in describing the relationship between handicapped children and the American public education system. Handicapped children from wealthy families had usually been admitted to residential care facilities while those from poor families were often hidden

or ignored. The exclusion of handicapped children from public schools continued even after mandatory attendance laws were enacted. Virtually no resources were provided for handicapped learners until interest was sparked by the John F. Kennedy Panel on Mental Retardation (Gallagher, 1989).

As early as 1911, laws had been passed giving social and religious agencies options for serving handicapped children. Carey (1971) outlined the history of federal legislation, a summary of which is shown in Table 1. The increase in legislative mandates as shown in Table 1 coincided with increased identification of and service to handicapped students. Meisger and King (1976) reported a 500% expansion of special education enrollment between 1958 and 1966. This was seven times the increase in the nation's school-age population during that same period. They also estimated that the two million school-age children identified as exceptional in 1966 still represented only 30% of those needing special services. Boyer (1978) reported a vast disparity among state-mandated school services in the period 1970-79. For example, in reviewing reports received from each of the 50 chief state school officers, Boyer noted that in Louisiana 3.9% of all students were served as speech-impaired, while in New Hampshire only 0.7% of the students received such services.

Added awareness of the need to educate the handicapped according to the provisions of P.L. 94-142 and Section 506 came about during the time that many disabled veterans were returning from fighting in Vietnam. Veterans' organizations tried to meet the needs of the disabled through existing federal programs such as the "GI Bill," but soon found themselves relying on court actions. These concerns which were translated into action through litigation not only changed the larger society but

Table 1

History of Federal Legislation

Year	Legislation Enacted
1954	President Eisenhower signed the Cooperative Research Act establishing grants to institutions for the conduct of research on and dissemination of information related to special learners.
1958	Public Law 85-926 provided support for teaching of mentally retarded children through grants to institutions of higher education and to state educational agencies.
1961	Public Law 87-276 authorized support for the training of classroom teachers of the deaf.
1962	Public Law 87-715 broadened the programs instituted by P.L. 85-905 into comprehensive instructional and developmental programs for special education.
1963	Programs supported by President John F. Kennedy provided the framework for Title III grants for the training of teachers for the handicapped.
1965	Public Law 89-258 further broadened the programs initially supported by P.L. 85-905 and expanded by P.L. 87-715.
1966	The Eighty-Ninth Congress created far-reaching programs for the education of the handicapped. The first legislation was the Technical Institute for the Deaf Act, P.L. 89-36. The second important piece of legislation was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), P.L. 89-10, which provided for direct assistance for the education of the handicapped.
1967	Public Law 90-247 and the ESEA Amendments of 1967 authorized regional service centers to assist school personnel in developing specific educational strategies for the handicapped learner.
1968	The Handicapped Early Education Act, P.L. 90-536, established national centers for educational media, materials, and technology to facilitate the education of the handicapped.
1973	Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, P.L. 93-112, contained regulations for the education of handicapped people for the workplace.
1975	The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, P.L. 94-142, provided educational rights to all exceptional children.
1986	The Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers was enacted as Public Law 99-457.

but also resulted in the removal of most remaining legal barriers to handicapped school-aged children.

The most recent major piece of federal legislation dealing with special education was the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1986, P.L. 99-457. Sections 101 and 210 (Titles I and II) provided for services to handicapped infants and toddlers (birth to three years) and to handicapped preschoolers (ages three to five), respectively. These same sections provided definitions, descriptions, and regulations regarding policy, eligibility, individualized family service plans (IFSPs), procedural safeguards, state interagency cooperation, and authorization and allocation of funds. Section 301 described discretionary programs such as regional resource centers, clearinghouses, and grants to state education agencies.

Least Restricted Environment

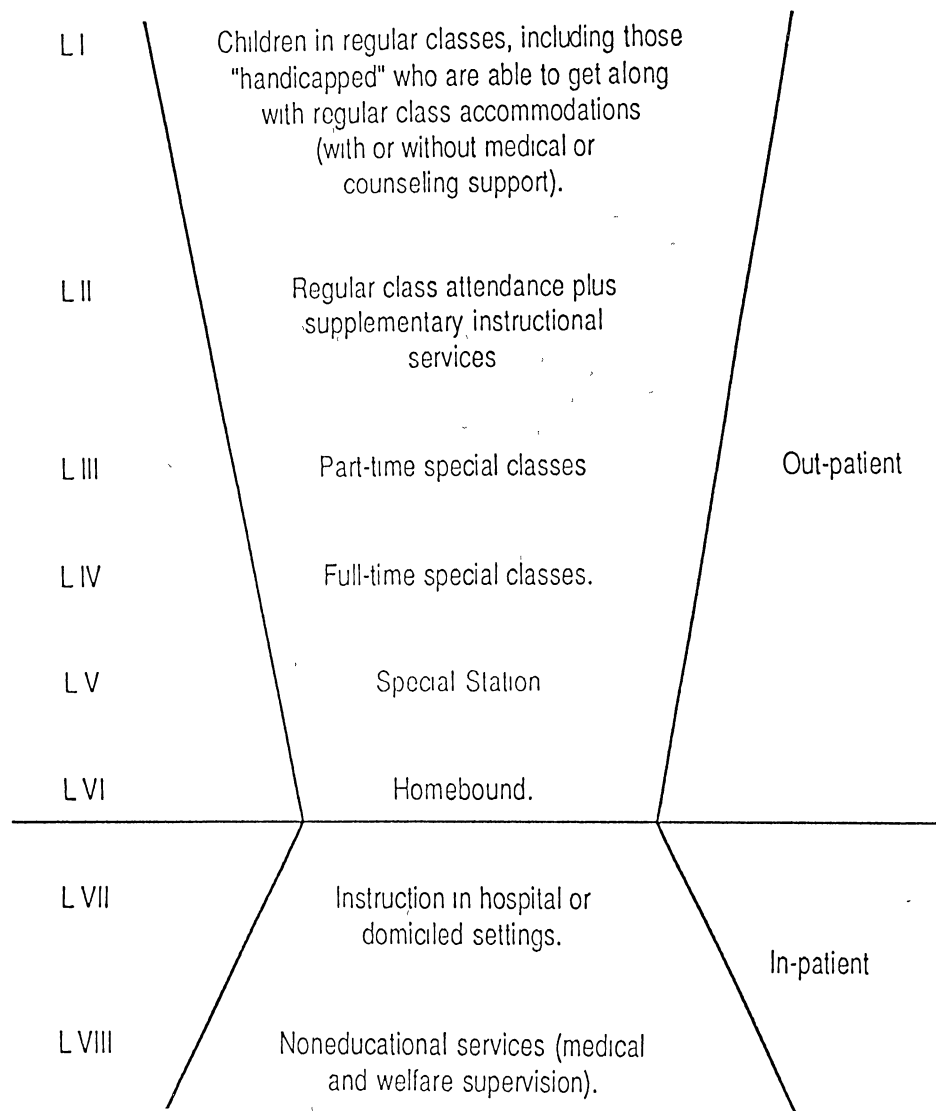
Keller (1977) wrote that the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112, Section 504) and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) defined basic provisions for the placement of special education students. In summarizing those provisions, Keller noted the following:

1. That handicapped persons be provided a free appropriate public education, regardless of the nature or severity of the handicap;
2. That handicapped students be educated with nonhandicapped students to the maximum extent appropriate for their needs;
3. That evaluation procedures be improved in order to avoid inappropriate education resulting from misclassification; and
4. That procedural safeguards be established so that parents and guardians can voice their opinions on evaluations and placement of children.

The term "least restrictive environment" (LRE) was thus defined primarily through the provisions of P.L. 93-112 and P.L. 94-142. Although the term "mainstreaming" is often used interchangeably with least restrictive environment, Keller (1977) wrote that such use caused misconceptions among teachers, representatives of the media, and parents.

Chiba and Semmel (1977, p. 21) found that "the least restrictive alternative is the one that realizes the most appropriate match between the characteristics of the pupil and the nature of the educational environment." Hence, the basic notion behind education of the handicapped was interpreted as the ability of each person to proceed on the most normal possible route. Abeson and Ballard (1976) concluded that the congressional intent was that the "principle of integration, not segregation, be the governing objective for all children" (p. 21). They pointed out that, in invoking the right of the handicapped to receive instruction in the least restrictive environment, the federal government was concerned that each child's individual educational needs be fully met. On the other hand, Royer (1981) pointed out that for some handicapped children, depending on the nature and severity of their disabilities, the least restrictive environment may be a separate, protective one. In other words, removal from a regular educational environment may be required to meet the appropriate instructional needs of some of the more severely handicapped children.

Chiba and Semmel (1977) developed a popular conceptual framework regarding the concept of least restrictive environment. As shown in Figure 1, the "Cascade System" provides eight alternative settings for programs, beginning with "regular" classes and proceeding to in-patient, noneducational services confined to medical and welfare supervision. The proper setting, obviously, would be determined by the nature and severity of each individual's handicap. Research for Better Schools (1979)



Source: Chiba and Semmel (1977).

Figure 1. Educational Aspects of Minimal Brain Dysfunction in Children

questioned the ability to make decisions regarding the least restrictive environment:

. . . based upon the idealistic assumptions that various placement options will actually exist for each handicapped child and that the nature or severity of the handicap should be the sole determinant of the extent to which the child can be educated with his/her non-handicapped peers (p. 52).

A number of court cases have dealt with the right of children to a free, appropriate public education and the related issues of appropriateness of educational programs, due process, and changes in educational settings. Two relatively early court cases which were specifically related to least restrictive environment were *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1971) and *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* (1972). In the former case, the court ordered the Pennsylvania officials to place each mentally handicapped child in a free, appropriate public program of education and training which was free of biases predetermined by test scores and free of segregated grouping. The court in the *Mills* case ordered the application of the principles of due process and least restrictive environment not only for the mentally handicapped but for all handicapped children.

In a class action suit, *Diana v. State Board of Education* (1970), it was alleged that nine Mexican-American children had been inappropriately placed, on the basis of inaccurate test scores, in a class for the mentally handicapped. This suit led to due process safeguards, including a provision in the California Code that "children of any ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural group not be placed in classes or special programs for the educable mentally retarded if they can be served in regular classes" (Chiba & Semmel, 1977, p. 20). In the case of *Wyatt v. Stickney* in 1972, the judge ruled that no person could be admitted to an institution unless a prior determination had been made that residence in the

institution was the least restrictive habitation setting feasible for that person.

In the "Willowbrook case" (New York State Association for Retarded Children v. Carey, 1975), the court ordered that the Willowbrook State School population of 5,700 residents be reduced to 250 or fewer within six years. In similar cases, a number of other states have been ordered to reduce their institutional populations of mentally handicapped individuals through placement in more normal community settings.

Public Laws 93-112, 94-142, and 99-457 have thus, in conjunction with numerous cases in both state and federal courts, established the right of each handicapped child to placement in a setting in which the child will receive the most appropriate education within the most normal possible environment. While the ramifications and interpretations of these principles are still being tested and revised, there can be no dispute that in the past two decades American schools have been part of the most significant changes in the education of the handicapped in all of educational history.

The Elementary Principal and Special Education

The elementary principal is the middle management administrator who is responsible for the operation of the school building and all of the programs contained therein. As the number of students and programs has become greater, the principal is inevitably faced with role conflicts. Not everything can conceivably be done by a single individual. Therefore, it has become important for educational administrators, particularly at the elementary level, to resolve the conflicts of who is responsible for what. Robson (1981) stated that the principal has been expected to take the major responsibility in all supervisory and educational aspects of personnel administration within the school building.

Added to this are management requisites, leadership requisites, curriculum directorship, and pupil services administration, as well as student activities supervision and budgetary management. It is no wonder, then, that the principal is sometimes seen as not involved in decision making relative to special education.

Davis (1980) found that the building principal played a critically important role in the overall placement process. Principals influenced the attitudes of regular teachers, parents, support staff, and paraprofessionals in critical placement decisions. Through personnel training and team implementation of programs, children's rights to an appropriate education was thus guaranteed.

Madsen and Reyes (1986) found that "coordination" was a key element of special education administration. They found that special education program principals and regular school principals spent similar proportions of time on activities related to pupil control and "organizational maintenance." However, special education principals were found to work at a less hectic pace, had a more flexible work routine organized into time blocks, and had more time for completing reports. While regular principals were involved in shorter meetings, they had to complete more supervisory activities.

Communication is a key factor in the development of constructive interaction with parents and faculty. Paul, Turnbull, and Cruickshank (1977) suggested that principals could generate an atmosphere of respect by using communications to demonstrate a willingness to share time, to discuss students' strengths and weaknesses, to advise on possible actions, to encourage input, and to implement the best possible plans for the students. Wilson (1982) reported that principals needed to master communications in six categories: (1) instruction and curriculum leadership, (2) personnel and student guidance, (3) school-community relations,

(4) administrative time allocations and budgeting, (5) evaluation, and (6) professional improvement of staff. Wilson also agreed that coordination was thus a primary function of the principal's role, with communication the key to that function.

Although most principals had minimal training in special education, the responsibility for chairing multidisciplinary meetings in the schools became their responsibility (Dickson & Moore, 1980). Although diagnostic, assessment, and placement decisions were made by placement teams consisting of teachers and ancillary personnel, in most states the principal became the administrator with the main responsibility for all details of the placement process.

Marsh and Podemski (1982) stressed that principals were not to entrust all assessment and placement matters to the staff because principals were legally accountable for the establishment of the most appropriate learning procedures and settings. In Oklahoma, however, it was clearly established that the principal was responsible for the assurance that "minimum, not optimum standards are being addressed" (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1988b, p. 1). Once again, it was the principal who was responsible for resolving conflicts over the interpretation of language relative to least restrictive environment and for preventing district-client disputes over due process.

Nutter, McBride, and Boone (1983) recognized that the changing role of special education directors appeared to be in conflict with the managerial tasks of the principal. While their research indicated that the directors had the more demanding position, principals' actual duties, in regard to the special education decision, entailed far more managerial responsibilities and functions. Trider and Leithwood (1988) saw these differences in roles as ambiguous and potentially in conflict with the legalities associated with the management of special education policies.

In a publication of the Bank Street College of Education, Frank (1982) outlined the characteristics and competencies needed by principals in schools serving special education students. Traits of empathy, integrity, creativity, and imagination were deemed vital to these principals. The seven functional roles which were identified included the following: (1) to promote special programs; (2) to represent trends and legal mandates that affect exceptional children; (3) to foster constructive staff development; (4) to observe, evaluate, and develop appropriate instructional learning environments; (5) to communicate assessment policies and methodology; (6) to facilitate cooperative, organizational structures for district, school, home, and community; and (7) to oversee political representation for special students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The investigative purpose of this study was to identify and compare the actual and the ideal degrees of involvement of elementary principals in the decisions pertaining to the placement of children within the least restrictive environment.

Research questions that have focused the study were as follows.

1. What are the activities through which elementary principals are involved in decisions pertaining to the placement of children within the least restrictive environment (LRE)?
2. To what degree are elementary principals actually involved in those LRE decisions?
3. To what degree would elementary principals ideally want to be involved in those LRE decisions?
4. What factors do elementary principals identify that cause their actual involvement to differ from their ideal involvement?

Population and Sample

The population for this study included all nonteaching elementary principals in independent school districts in the State of Oklahoma. Independent school districts comprised 455 of the 610 districts in the state. There were 622 individuals in the population, as identified by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (1988a). Teaching principals, dependent school district principals, and principals in nonpublic schools

have been excluded from the population due to the variation in roles and responsibilities of those individuals in comparison with the nonteaching principals. A random sample of 120 members of the population was selected for this study. A numbered list of individuals in the population was created from the 1988-89 Education Directory (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1988a). A list of random numbers was then used to select the sample.

Instrument

An instrument was developed specifically for this study. The first step in this development involved the identification, from the literature, of activities related to the decisions regarding placement of students in the least restrictive environment. The list of activities was then reviewed by four experts in the field of special education administration, two administrators in the State Department of Education and two local school district administrators. The purpose of the review was to determine if the activity listing included all activities pertinent to the decisions and if the activities listed would be within the possible range of involvement by elementary principals in decisions relative to the placement of students in the least restrictive environment.

The first portion of the instrument contained items relative to demographics, including the student enrollment in the subject's school district and school and gender, age, education, and experience of the subject. The revised list of activities provided the content for the next two portions of the instrument. In the second segment, the subjects were asked to indicate, on a Likert-type scale, the actual degree of involvement in each activity. The third section contained the same list of activities and the same scale, but included directions for the subject

to indicate the ideal degree of involvement in each activity. The final portion of the instrument consisted of an open-ended question concerning factors that might cause the ideal involvement to differ from the actual involvement.

The completed pilot version of the instrument was then given to six elementary principals, who were not members of the random sample, and to two higher education faculty members, one in special education and the other in educational administration. These individuals were asked to respond to the instrument itself, as elementary principals, and then to provide data regarding the amount of time required for completion, a listing of items which were unclear or otherwise difficult to respond to, and other suggestions which might make the instrument more reliable in administration. Following this pilot study, the instrument was revised and again reviewed by the panel of experts before administration to the sample.

Data Collection

A packet of materials was mailed to each subject identified in the random sample. Included in this packet were a cover letter explaining the study and the instrument (Appendix A), the instrument itself (Appendix B), a self-addressed stamped envelope for return of the instrument, and a self-addressed stamped postcard for confirmation of the instrument's return (Appendix C).

A reminder postcard was mailed to nonrespondents three weeks following the initial mailing. A telephone follow-up was made, two weeks after the second mailing to those who had still not responded. If necessary, a second copy of the packet materials was sent to nonrespondents.

Data Analysis

The demographic data were analyzed to identify differences between the respondents and the population and to determine differences in principals' involvement according to gender, age, education, and experience. These data regarding actual and ideal involvement were analyzed through the computation of percentage distributions and measures of central tendency.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

The investigative purpose of this study was to identify and to compare the degree of actual and of ideal involvement of elementary principals in the placement decisions regarding handicapped children. The following research questions were used to focus the data gathering efforts:

1. What are the activities through which elementary principals are involved in decisions pertaining to the placement of children within the least restrictive environment?
2. To what degree are elementary principals actually involved in those LRE decisions?
3. To what degree would elementary principals ideally want to be involved in those LRE decisions?
4. What factors do elementary principals identify that cause their actual involvement to differ from their ideal involvement?

This chapter contains a summary and an analysis of the data which were collected through a survey of a random sample of elementary principals in independent school districts in the State of Oklahoma. In the first section of the chapter, data are reported relative to the schools and school districts of the respondent principals. Next are reported demographic data regarding these same respondents. The third portion of the chapter includes an analysis of the actual and the ideal involvement of the principals in decisions regarding the placement of special

learners. The final segment then contains a description of the principals' perceptions of the factors that cause their actual involvement to differ from ideal involvement.

Schools and School Districts

As noted in Chapter III, a random sample of 120 elementary principals was selected from all nonteaching elementary principals in Oklahoma's independent school districts. On May 1, 1989, a survey instrument was sent to each of the members of the sample. By June 15, 1989, responses had been received from 75 of those individuals, for a response rate of 62.5%.

In Part I of the research questionnaire (Appendix C), each principal was asked to provide the numbers of students in the school district as a whole and in the principal's elementary school. Each was also asked to indicate the numbers of students served in special education programs. As shown in Table 2, the school sizes were calculated by the number of students and were categorized into three groups. The small schools each enrolled less than 300 students, while medium-sized schools each had between 300 and 500 students. The largest schools each had a student enrollment greater than 500. The respondents were somewhat evenly distributed among these three size categories, with slightly fewer in the largest category and the greatest number in the middle category.

From data supplied by the Oklahoma State Department of Education, the average size of elementary schools in independent districts in the State of Oklahoma was computed to be 297.85 students. Therefore, two thirds of the respondents administered schools that were larger than the state average.

Table 3 provides a summary of the sizes of the respondents' school districts. Again, the size data were collected as student enrollment

Table 2
Number of Respondent Principals, by
School Size

Category	School Size		Respondents	
		Enrollment	Number	Percentage
Small		0-299	25	33.3
Medium		300-499	28	37.3
Large		500+	<u>22</u>	<u>29.3</u>
Totals			75	99.9

Table 3
Number of Respondent Principals, by
School District Size

Category	School District Size		Respondents	
		Enrollment	Number	Percentage
Small		0-299	22	29.3
Medium		1,000-2,999	27	36.0
Large		3,000 or more	<u>26</u>	<u>34.7</u>
Totals			75	100.0

totals and were divided into three categories. The three size categories included, first, those districts with less than 1,000 students, then districts with from 1,000 to 3,000 students enrolled, and finally, those districts with 3,000 or more students. As can be seen from Table 3, the respondent principals were again somewhat evenly divided among the three categories. Since it has often been reported that over half of Oklahoma's independent school districts have less than 500 students, the respondents, to a large degree, represented the larger districts in the state. However, when one realizes that the 30 largest school districts enroll approximately one half of all students in the state, it becomes apparent that the larger districts also employ a disproportionately larger share of the principals in Oklahoma.

The principals were asked to provide the number of special education students served in their respective schools. However, since those data were provided by only a small percentage of the respondents, an analysis could not be made of that variable. While a definite reason for the failure to respond to that item cannot be provided, it is likely that principals either did not have an accurate total immediately available or were concerned that a response might create conflict with the important current issues of confidentiality and maintenance of students' privacy.

The final data regarding the respondents' schools concerned the grade levels that were enrolled in each. As might be expected, the most common ranges of grades housed in a school were kindergarten through grade six (22 schools) and kindergarten through grade five (17 schools). Other grade structures reported for their schools by principals included K-4 (eight schools), K-8 (five schools), and K-3 and 1-6 (four each). The other 15 schools were described by their principals as having other grade combinations, including two schools in which all students were in a single grade.

Characteristics of Respondents

The survey instrument was designed to collect demographic data in a number of different categories. Therefore, data were collected regarding the gender, age, education, certification, and experience of the respondents. These are reported and analyzed in this portion of the chapter.

As shown in Table 4, there were no respondents who were aged 30 or less. The most common ages for male principals were from 41 through 45, with 38% reportedly in that range. On the other hand, that age group was represented by very few female principals, the largest number of whom was found to be in the age range of 46 through 50. Even though the age ranges did not show similar proportions among male and female principals, the average age for both groups was computed to be 44 years. Females accounted for just under 30% of the total group of respondents. These data were consistent with data collected from the State Department of Education regarding the total population of elementary principals in the State of Oklahoma.

With one exception, the respondents reported having earned at least a master's degree. Since Oklahoma certification as a building principal requires that minimum amount of work in a graduate program, this is not surprising. The one respondent who had not completed a master's degree was assigned as a teaching principal and thus was not required to hold such certification. That individual did report, however, that nearly all coursework had been completed for the degree. Eight percent of the respondents had completed a higher degree, with two of those having earned a specialist certificate (Ed.S.), and the other four a doctorate (Ed.D. or Ph.D.).

The principal focus of respondents in their graduate programs was school administration, with at least 33 (44%) of the respondents having

majored in that area of study. Of these, one fourth indicated specialization in the field of elementary school administration, while two individuals had majored in secondary school administration. The other administration students did not indicate any specialization within degree programs generally described simply as "administration." While 44% of the respondents had majored in school administration, 38% reported majors in other fields, including early childhood, adult, elementary, secondary, and special education; business science; guidance; reading; and physical education and health. The remaining 19% of the respondents did not report a specific major field of study for their graduate degree(s).

Table 4

Number of Respondent Principals, by
Age and by Gender

Age Group	Respondents, by Gender					
	Female		Male		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than 25	0	0	0	0	0	0
26-30	0	0	0	0	0	0
31-35	3	14	5	9	8	11
36-40	4	18	7	13	11	15
41-45	3	14	20	38	23	31
46-50	8	36	11	21	19	25
51 and over	<u>4</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>19</u>
Totals	22	100	53	100	75	100

Principals were asked to indicate the number of years of experience which they had acquired in each of four levels of teaching (early childhood, elementary, secondary, and special education), and in each of two levels of administration (elementary and secondary). As shown in Table 5, 63 of the 75 respondents (84%) reported having had teaching experience in an elementary classroom. This proportion is unexpectedly low, since state certification requirements mandate that an applicant for elementary principal certification have two years of teaching experience in an accredited elementary school. It is possible that some of the principals had K-12 teaching certificates in fields such as physical education or music, and that, since those individuals may have spent a major portion of each day teaching in a secondary school, they therefore did not report having had that elementary experience. It may be somewhat surprising to note that approximately one half of the respondent elementary principals reported having had secondary teaching experience, although the vast majority of those had less than six years experience at that level. Only 20% of the respondents had had more than 15 years of teaching experience.

There were 11 instances in which respondents reported having had experience in either early childhood or special education. Most of the elementary principals who responded to the survey thus had little or no previous classroom experience with special learners such as those for whom placement decisions were being made.

As far as previous administrative experience is concern, Table 6 provides a summary of those data as collected from the respondents. As would be expected, the vast majority (63, or 84%) of the elementary principals had not had any administrative experience at the secondary level. Of the remainder, only four had more than five years of secondary administrative experience. The amount of administrative experience at the elementary school level ranged from only 1 to more than 20 years. Only

Table 5

Number of Respondent Principals, by Type
and by Length of Teaching Experience

Type of Experience	Number of Respondents, by Years of Experience					Total
	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+	
Early Childhood	5	0	0	0	0	5
Elementary	19	20	13	8	3	63
Secondary	27	4	3	3	0	37
Special Education	4	1	0	1	0	6

Table 6

Number of Respondent Principals, by Type and
by Length of Administrative Experience

Years of Experience	Number of Respondents, by Level of Experience	
	Elementary	Secondary
None	0	63
1-5	33	8
6-10	15	4
11-15	13	0
16-20	5	0
21+	9	0
Totals	75	75

about one third of the principals had acquired more than 10 years of such experience.

Degree of Involvement by Principals

As stated in the cover letter (Appendix A) which was sent with the instrument to the principals in the sample, the optimum learning environment facilitates the cognitive, affective, social, and aesthetic development of most students. For special learners, this setting is defined as the least restrictive environment, a term which was described in detail in Chapter II of this study. Parts II and III of the research instrument were designed to collect data relative to the actual and the ideal involvement of elementary principals in 23 activities related to decisions regarding the proper placement of these students. The degree of involvement was indicated on a Likert-type scale which had the following categories: (1) I have no part in that task, (2) I delegate that task to someone else, (3) I supervise someone else who does that task, (4) I participate with others in doing that task, and (5) I do this task myself.

Table 7 contains data on the actual and the ideal involvement of the respondents in these decisions. On a scale of 0.00 through 4.00, the least actual involvement by a principal was 0.60, while the greatest actual involvement was 3.52. The mean for all actual involvement was 2.40. For ideal involvement, the least desired involvement was scored at 0.60 (by the same individual who had the actual involvement of 0.60), and the greatest ideal involvement by a principal was calculated at 3.91. While only six principals reported actual involvement greater than 3.00, 16 reported their ideal involvement to be in that range.

In Table 8 are data regarding the mean scores which indicate the degree of involvement by principals in each of the 23 activities which

were identified as being related to placement decisions. For each item, the mean of the scores of all 75 respondents is given for the actual involvement and for the ideal involvement. Also provided is the difference between the two means for each activity. The average degree of actual involvement for all respondent principals was 2.40, on a scale of 0.00 through 4.00. The average degree of ideal involvement was indicated at 2.65.

Table 7

Actual and Ideal Involvement by Principals

Range of Scores	<u>Respondents, by Type of Involvement</u>			
	<u>Actual</u>		<u>Ideal</u>	
	No.	%	No.	%
0.00-0.50	0	0.0	0	0.0
0.51-1.00	2	2.6	3	4.0
1.01-1.50	3	4.0	2	2.6
1.51-2.00	12	16.0	7	9.3
2.01-2.50	22	29.3	22	29.3
2.51-3.00	30	40.0	25	33.3
3.01-3.50	5	6.7	12	16.0
3.51-4.00	<u>1</u>	<u>1.3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5.3</u>
Totals	75	99.9	75	99.9

Table 8
Degree of Involvement by Principals, by
Placement Activity

Item No.	Activity Description	Mean Score		Difference
		Actual	Ideal	
1	Communicate to staff/parents	2.69	2.88	+0.19
2	Administer assessment instrument	0.69	1.16	+0.47
3	Schedule adequate staff time	2.07	2.37	+0.30
4	Arrange conference site and time	1.59	1.99	+0.40
5	Attend placement conference	3.15	3.15	0.00
6	Sign forms regarding placement	3.44	3.40	-0.04
7	Notify parents of eligibility	1.72	2.05	+0.33
8	Provide parents with legal rights	2.07	2.29	+0.22
9	Identify personnel and facilities	2.56	2.89	+0.33
10	Arrange nonconflicting activities	2.63	2.80	+0.17
11	Establish goals and objectives	2.07	2.37	+0.30
12	Determine program needs	2.32	2.68	+0.36
13	Acquire needed resources	2.52	2.92	+0.40
14	Monitor progress of students	2.29	2.48	+0.19
15	Identify available services	2.67	2.79	+0.12
16	Characterize by descriptors	2.15	2.59	+0.44
17	Keep abreast of legalities	3.28	3.36	+0.08
18	Maintain required documentation	2.25	2.44	+0.19
19	Set up clear expectations	2.76	2.95	+0.19
20	Establish systems of incentives	2.29	2.64	+0.35
21	Create shared decision-making	3.08	3.16	+0.08
22	Educate staff on conflicts	2.91	3.15	+0.24
23	Coordinate program evaluation	<u>2.11</u>	<u>2.53</u>	<u>+0.42</u>
		2.40	2.65	+0.25

The activity with the greatest degree of involvement, both actual and ideal, was listed on the instrument as item 6, ". . . sign forms regarding placement." This was also the only activity on which respondents indicated an ideal level of involvement lower than the actual current involvement. The activity with the least involvement, both actual and ideal, was item 2, ". . . administer assessment instruments to students." In Oklahoma, the building principal is given the responsibility of signing most documents relative to the placement of students in special education programs, while regulations require certification as a psychometrist in order to administer most of the student assessment instruments typically used in support of placement decisions.

The activities with the greatest degree of involvement, as described by principals, are listed in Tables 9 and 10, for actual and ideal involvement, respectively. The activities, from the 23 listed on the survey instrument, are designated by both the item number from the instrument and an abbreviated description. The mean score for all respondents is also reported for each activity.

It is interesting and important to note that the activities which principals indicated that they ideally would be involved in to the greatest degree are the same activities with which they indicated the greatest actual involvement. While the items were in somewhat different order of priority on the two dimensions, principals did indicate that they would ideally want to have a slightly greater degree of involvement on four of the five activities. The ideal involvement for the fifth activity was slightly less than the actual involvement.

Table 11 contains similar data regarding those activities for which the principals reported the least actual involvement, while the companion Table 12 shows the activities for which principals reported having the least involvement in an ideal setting. As with those activities with the

Table 9

Placement-Related Activities With Greatest
Actual Involvement by Principals

Item Number	Activity Description	Mean Score
6	Sign forms regarding placement	3.44
17	Keep abreast of legal requirements	3.28
5	Attend placement conferences	3.15
21	Create climate of shared decisions	3.08
22	Educate staff on conflicts	2.91

Table 10

Placement-Related Activities With Greatest
Ideal Involvement by Principals

Item Number	Activity Description	Mean Score
6	Sign forms regarding placement	3.40
17	Keep abreast of legal requirements	3.36
21	Create climate of shared decisions	3.16
5	Attend placement conference	3.15
22	Educate staff on possible conflicts	3.15

Table 11

Placement-Related Activities With Least
Actual Involvement by Principals

Item Number	Activity Description	Mean Score
1	Administer assessment instrument	0.69
4	Arrange conference site and time	1.59
7	Notify parents of eligibility	1.72
3	Schedule adequate staff time	2.07
8	Provide parents with legal rights	2.07
11	Establish goals and objectives	2.07

Table 12

Placement-Related Activities With Least
Ideal Involvement by Principals

Item Number	Activity Description	Mean Score
2	Administer assessment instrument	1.16
4	Arrange conference site and time	1.99
7	Notify parents of meetings	2.05
3	Schedule adequate staff time	2.37
11	Establish goals and objectives	2.37

greatest involvement, the activities with least involvement were also similar from both actual and ideal perspectives. Several of these activities are organizational or perhaps even clerical in nature, including arranging for conference site, time, and day; notifying parents of eligibility; scheduling staff time; and providing parents with a statement of their legal rights.

Table 13 highlights those activities for which principals indicated the greatest disparity between their actual current involvement and the degree of involvement which they would ideally wish to have. The activity for which there was the greatest discrepancy (administration of assessment instruments) was also the activity for which the principals indicated the least actual involvement and for which there currently is a certification barrier that likely prevents greater involvement by most principals. Other activities for which principals indicated the greatest desire for a larger role included those related to scheduling meetings, acquiring resources, coordinating planning and evaluation, and modeling behavior which would encourage teachers to identify students by learning descriptors rather than by handicap.

The data in Table 14 indicate the activities for which principals reported the least discrepancy between their current involvement and their ideal involvement. Four of the five activities indicated on Table 14 were also among the activities for which principals indicated the greatest actual involvement (see Table 9).

The data regarding the actual and the ideal involvement of elementary principals in the 23 activities identified as related to placement decisions were also analyzed in an attempt to determine if there were differences in the involvement of principals according to the various demographic variables for which data had been collected. The analysis of

Table 13
Placement-Related Activities With Greatest
Disparity Between Actual and Ideal
Involvement by Principals

Activity		
Item Number	Description	Disparity
2	Administer assessment instrument	0.47
16	Characterize by descriptors	0.44
23	Coordinate program evaluation	0.42
4	Arrange conference site and time	0.40
13	Acquire needed resources	0.40

Table 14
Placement-Related Activities With Least
Disparity Between Actual and Ideal
Involvement by Principals

Activity		
Item Number	Description	Disparity
5	Attend placement conference	0.00
6	Sign forms regarding placement	0.04
17	Keep abreast of legalities	0.08
21	Create shared decision-making	0.08
15	Identify available services	0.12

each variable included the calculation of mean scores for involvement of the respondents as categorized within each variable.

As previously reported, the district size of each respondent was categorized on the basis of the number of students enrolled in the entire school district. Table 15 contains data relative to the degree of involvement in the placement-related activities of principals, according to the size of the school district. Principals in the mid-sized school districts reported less actual involvement, while those in the largest district size category indicated a desire for the greatest level of ideal involvement. There was almost no difference between the actual and the ideal levels of involvement reported by principals in the smallest school districts. The degree of difference between actual and ideal increased directly with the increase in the size of the district.

Table 15

Degree of Involvement by Principals,
by District Size

Number of Students	Actual Involvement		Ideal Involvement		Difference
	No.	Mean Score	No.	Mean Score	
0-999	22	2.47	22	2.54	0.07
1,000-2,999	27	2.24	27	2.50	0.26
3,000+	<u>26</u>	<u>2.42</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>2.77</u>	<u>0.35</u>
Totals	75	2.40	75	2.65	0.25

When the demographic variable, size of school, was analyzed, it was found that principals in the smallest elementary schools were involved in placement-related activities to a lesser degree than those in either the mid-sized or the largest schools (Table 16). They were also less likely to want greater involvement. On the other hand, the principals of the mid-sized elementary schools not only had the greatest current involvement, but were also those who wanted the greatest ideal level of involvement. While all three groups of principals indicated an ideal level of involvement greater than their actual involvement, this difference was most pronounced among the principals of the mid-sized schools and smallest among the large-school principals.

Table 16
Degree of Involvement by Principals,
by School Size

Number of Students	Actual Involvement		Ideal Involvement		Difference
	No.	Mean Score	No.	Mean Score	
0-299	25	2.23	25	2.44	0.21
300-499	28	2.49	28	2.81	0.32
500+	<u>22</u>	<u>2.40</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>2.55</u>	<u>0.15</u>
Totals	75	2.40	75	2.65	0.25

As shown in Table 17, female principals were involved in activities related to student placement to a greater degree than were male principals and also reported a higher ideal level of involvement. Thus, female principals also exhibited a greater difference between actual and ideal levels of involvement.

Table 17

Degree of Involvement by Principals,
by Gender

Gender	<u>Actual Involvement</u>		<u>Ideal Involvement</u>		Difference
	<u>No.</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	
Male	53	2.36	53	2.55	0.19
Female	<u>22</u>	<u>2.41</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>2.75</u>	<u>0.34</u>
Totals	75	2.40	75	2.65	0.25

As previously shown, the ages of the respondents had originally been categorized into seven groups, the youngest two of which had no representation among those principals. The remaining five groups are shown in Table 18 with the applicable mean scores for actual and for ideal involvement in placement activities. While the actual degree of involvement by the principals was similar in nearly all age groups, those aged from 36 through 40 had a somewhat higher level of such involvement. On the other hand, when examining the ideal levels of involvement, the principals in the age range of 46 through 50 had the highest reported

level. This group also reported the greatest difference between actual and ideal levels of involvement. The least disparity between actual and ideal involvement was computed for those respondents between the ages of 36 and 45.

Table 18

Degree of Involvement by Principals,
by Age of Principal

Age in Years	<u>Actual Involvement</u>		<u>Ideal Involvement</u>		Difference
	No.	Mean Score	No.	Mean Score	
31-35	7	2.36	7	2.63	0.27
36-40	12	2.53	12	2.63	0.10
41-45	22	2.33	22	2.43	0.10
46-50	20	2.39	20	2.81	0.42
51+	<u>14</u>	<u>2.32</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>2.58</u>	<u>0.26</u>
Totals	75	2.40	75	2.65	0.25

Data relative to the amount of elementary teaching experience and the actual and the ideal involvement in placement-related activities are shown in Table 19. The responding principals had a pattern of actual involvement that increased from no elementary teaching experience until 6 to 10 years of experience. From that peak of actual involvement (2.61), the degree of involvement then decreased. Those principals with more than 20 years of experience thus reported the least actual involvement in

those activities. The general pattern, while somewhat less clear, was also evident in the ideal degree of involvement reported by the principals. Again, those with the most elementary teaching experience reported the lowest degree of involvement in the 23 activities related to student placement. The difference between actual and ideal involvement revealed no such pattern, however. The greatest disparity existed for those who reported no elementary teaching experience and for those with 16 to 20 years of such experience.

Table 19
Degree of Involvement by Principals, by
Years of Elementary Teaching Experience

Years of Experience	<u>Actual Involvement</u>		<u>Ideal Involvement</u>		Difference
	No.	Mean Score	No.	Mean Score	
None	11	2.22	11	2.60	0.38
1-5	21	2.44	21	2.55	0.11
6-10	17	2.61	17	2.87	0.26
11-15	14	2.40	14	2.62	0.22
16-20	8	2.11	8	2.49	0.38
21+	<u>4</u>	<u>1.95</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2.06</u>	<u>0.11</u>
Totals	75	2.40	75	2.65	0.25

Items 5 and 6 of the survey instrument requested that the respondents indicate whether or not there was a special education administrator, special education cooperative representative, psychometrist, and/or prescriptive evaluator present at the placement conferences. Of the total of 75 respondents, 67 (89.3%) indicated that one or more individuals in positions such as these were present at conference times. Table 20 shows the degrees of actual and of ideal involvement by principals in activities related to the placement decisions made at the conferences. While there was virtually no difference between the two groups of principals in terms of their actual involvement, those principals who did not have the assistance of special education professionals at their conferences indicated a higher ideal level of involvement and thus a greater difference between actual and ideal. While it might be expected that those with additional professional assistance would indicate a lesser degree of actual involvement, this was not the case.

Table 20
Degree of Involvement by Principals, by
the Presence of a Special Education
Professional at the Conference

Professional Present?	<u>Actual Involvement</u>		<u>Ideal Involvement</u>		Difference
	No.	Mean Score	No.	Mean Score	
Yes	67	2.39	67	2.59	0.20
No	<u>8</u>	<u>2.32</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>2.76</u>	<u>0.44</u>
Total	75	2.40	75	2.65	0.25

Inhibiting Factors

The final segment of the survey instrument was designed to identify those factors which elementary principals perceived to cause their actual involvement in activities related to placement decisions to be different from their ideal involvement. As noted earlier in this chapter, in nearly every form of analysis, the elementary principals who responded to the survey indicated that they would prefer to be involved to a greater degree than their current level of involvement.

While just over one half of the respondents actually provided responses to Part IV of the instrument, those who did provided a glimpse at the problems faced by elementary principals. Four general problem areas were defined by these comments: workload, training, resources, and policies.

Workload was cited as the most significant problem by 15 principals, nearly one half of those who responded to Part IV of the instrument. The most dominant workload issue was related to time constraints. Six principals specifically reported that the federal mandates and monitoring were very time-consuming activities. They indicated that the provision of trained directors would allow special education to retain its effectiveness at district levels. Eight other principals defined their workloads as including counseling and/or coaching duties, therefore creating heavy demands on their time.

Eight principals reported that they needed more specialized training in order to spot potentially at-risk learners and to understand special education guidelines, particularly as they relate to potential litigation. In a related series of comments, three principals noted a better

ability to serve special learners was provided by the presence of a trained special educator as director of special services.

Problems created by lack of resources were cited by four principals. The resources highlighted in these comments were money and personnel.

The final set of factors which respondents cited as causing their actual involvement to be less than ideal involved issues relative to policy. These respondents reported that state and/or federal guidelines needed clear-cut definitions and explanations. A lack of local district policy in special education areas was also reported by three of these principals as being a problem area.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMENTARY

Summary

This study was designed to focus on the problems faced by school administrators as they seek to provide all of their students with an optimum education and to ensure the complete implementation of the special education mandates established by laws, regulations, and judicial decrees. The specific purpose was to identify and compare the actual and the ideal degrees of involvement of elementary principals in the decisions pertaining to the placement of handicapped children within the least restrictive environment. The following research questions were used to focus the study:

1. What are the activities through which elementary principals are involved in decisions pertaining to the placement of children within the least restrictive environment?
2. To what degree are elementary principals actually involved in those LRE decisions?
3. To what degree would elementary principals ideally want to be involved in those LRE decisions?
4. What factors do elementary principals identify that cause their actual involvement to differ from their ideal involvement?

Data were obtained through a survey instrument, designed especially for this study, which was mailed to a random sample of 120 elementary principals in independent school districts in Oklahoma. The instrument was developed to identify the degree to which the principals were actually involved (and would ideally prefer to be involved) in 23 activities which had been identified as related to the placement decisions for handicapped students. Additional segments of the instrument were designed to collect demographic data regarding the respondents and to identify those factors which principals believed caused their actual and ideal involvement to differ. A total return of 75 usable instruments resulted in a response rate of 62.5%.

It was found that, on a scale of 0.00 through 4.00, the respondents' actual degree of involvement was 2.40, with a range of 0.60 to 3.52. The ideal degree of involvement was 2.65 for all respondents, with a range of 0.60 to 3.91. The activities for which principals indicated the greatest involvement, both actual and ideal, were those associated with signing forms, legal requirements, attendance at conferences, shared decision-making, and dealing with conflict.

When examining the relationship between involvement in placement-related activities and size of school district, it was found that the difference between actual and ideal involvement increased as district size increased. However, this relationship did not exist when considering size of the school rather than the whole district.

Female principals were not only involved to a greater degree than male principals, but they also reported ideal involvement at a greater degree and with a larger difference between actual and ideal. No apparent patterns were found when examining the relationship between age and involvement.

Principals reported a variety of factors that prevented their actual involvement from matching their ideal involvement. These factors were categorized as workload, training, resources, and policies. Time constraints, created by the number of different functions they were expected to handle, were cited most often as an inhibiting factor.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were identified from the findings of this study:

1. Elementary principals would ideally be involved to a greater degree in the activities related to placement decisions for handicapped children, if the barriers related to workload, training, resources, and policies were eliminated.

2. The variety of role responsibilities and the magnitude of legal provisions regarding special education are two factors that are of great concern to elementary principals.

3. Elementary principals are involved to a greater degree in mandated tasks such as signing forms and monitoring legal provisions, while they would rather be involved to a greater degree in leadership activities related to such issues as the way teachers perceived special learners, the conduct of program evaluation, and the acquisition of necessary resources.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made on the basis of this study. The first set of recommendations are for the practice of school administration as it relates generally to special education and specifically to placement decisions.

1. Elementary principals should have access to the services of one or more special education professionals to advise the principals regarding learning styles, diagnostic and prescriptive assessment results, and legal and regulatory provisions, among a number of related topics. While most principals have such educators available at the placement conferences, their availability is limited and should be increased, particularly through the training and employment of greater numbers of trained special education administrators.

2. Elementary principals should be provided with greater opportunities for training in the many specific topics related to special education. Such training should be provided by the local district so that the content may be made most applicable to the principals' specific situations. For those districts which are too small to provide such training themselves, cooperative arrangements should be made with other districts, particularly those available larger districts which have special services departments.

3. Superintendents and personnel directors should be encouraged to specifically seek applicants for administrative positions who have had special and/or early childhood education experience. Likewise, university faculty in administrator preparation programs should also seek and encourage special and early childhood educators for entry into their programs and subsequent preparation for administrative positions. These recommended actions are supported by the findings relative to the importance of special education law and policies for effective administration of schools and the possible underrepresentation of special and early childhood education professionals in the administrative ranks.

4. University faculty and state professional standards boards should consider the addition of coursework related specifically to

special education in certification programs for public school administrators. With the increase in the numbers of identified children with special needs and the increased emphasis of least restrictive environment on placement in regular school settings, administrators play roles of vital importance in placement decisions, advisory activities, and efforts to prevent legal challenges to their special education programs.

5. More effective site management could be established by the designation of a trained special education professional, in one or more of the special disciplines available for placement, who would have the authority to participate as the administrative designee in placement decisions. Such involvement could include, but would not be limited to, managerial functions such as signing forms, notifying parents and teachers, and scheduling meetings. These individuals would have the full authority currently reserved for the building principal and would act on that individual's behalf. Such use of special education professionals should be done in a climate of shared decision-making and participatory management, including not only the principal and the special educator, but also teachers, parents, other staff, and, where appropriate, students themselves.

6. Superintendents should consider the establishment of local task forces to provide review and advice relative to the operation of special services programs in their districts. Such task forces should include representatives of the board of education, administration, regular classroom and special education teachers, and parents of exceptional children.

The final set of recommendations concern possible future research efforts related to the topics of this study.

1. Research should be done on the preparation and the certification of special education administrators.

2. Another related research topic would be the functions and qualifications of special education professionals who could serve in advisory capacities for regular school administrators and staff.

3. Efforts should be made to identify the reasons why there are so few special education or early childhood education teachers who seek to obtain certification and employment as school administrators.

4. A final area of study might be related to the preparation programs for school administrators and the manner in which greater emphasis on special education could be incorporated into the coursework related to such programs.

Commentary

From an idealistic viewpoint, it was disappointing that the ideal degree of involvement of elementary principals was not greater than their current levels of involvement in special education placement decisions. In reality, the workload of an elementary principal is often so great that it may alone account for the small difference between the respondents' actual involvement and their ideal level of involvement.

The premise that a principal can be actively involved with all special-needs children in the building is somewhat unrealistic. Yet, many principals know that active involvement with exceptional children will increase their knowledge of and sensitivity to the varied learning styles of these children. The principal's presence in working, even to a small degree, with these students can provide them with another role model, may reduce discipline problems, and will enhance the self-images of the students, enabling them to become more positive forces in the larger community of life.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER TO PRINCIPALS



Oklahoma State University

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION
AND HIGHER EDUCATION

STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA 74078 0146
309 GUNDERSEN HALL
405-744-7244

6504 Blackberry Road
Edmond, OK 73034
405-348-3079

Principal

In addition to my involvement in special education in the Oklahoma City area, I am a doctoral student in educational administration at Oklahoma State University. Through my advisors and committee, Drs Ken St Clair, Jerry Bass, Ken Stern, and Barbara Wilkinson, I am researching elementary principals' involvement in least restrictive environments.

Research has shown that the optimum learning environment facilitates the cognitive, affective, social and aesthetic development of all students. As a principal, you are one of the chief determinants of that optimum learning environment. You set the tone for staff, student, parent and community attitudes toward special students

I realize that this is the busiest time of the school year. But through reflective thought, I hope that you will assist in researching the roles that principals play in special educational placement decisions.

No attempt will be made to identify your report. It will be completely confidential, even if you request a copy of the study. The demographic - Part I information will be charted in my study. In Parts II and III, please consider the listed special education placement activities and indicate your actual involvement and ideal involvement by checking the appropriate corresponding box. Part IV asks you to compare your actual involvement with your ideal involvement, listing those items that hinder your achievement of ideal involvement

I will distinguish between least restrictive environment (LRE) as the lab or regular classroom situation which best suits the needs of the qualified student. "Placement" refers to the direct or indirect services to be considered by the team of the identified special student

Thank you for your time and involvement in this study. Hopefully your responses will benefit principals throughout Oklahoma

Yours in education,

Sharon (Susie) Park
Ed D. Candidate



APPENDIX B

POST CARD REMINDER



First Land Run, 1889
 Territory Established, 1890
 Cherokee Strip Run, 1893

© USPS 1989

Principals Involved in LRE Placement

- I will participate in this study by returning Parts I-IV by May 15.*
- I will not participate in this study at this time.*
- I will participate in this study and wish a copy of the results by June 15.*
- I wish a Landrun Commemoration postcard with April 22, 1889 date for my participation.*

APPENDIX C
QUESTIONNAIRE

Part I

**A COMPARISON OF THE ACTUAL AND IDEAL
INVOLVEMENT OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS
IN PLACEMENT DECISIONS PERTAINING TO
SPECIAL EDUCATION AND LEAST
RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT.**

1. Circle the grade levels that are included in your building.

K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

2. Total number of students in your school: _____

3. Total number of special education students in your school who are receiving educational or related services:

4. Total number of students in your school district. _____

5. Is there a special education administrator or a co-op representative at the eligibility and/or placement conferences of identified special education students in your school? ____ Yes ____ No

6. Is there a psychometrist or prescriptive evaluator present at these conferences? ____ Yes ____ No

7. Please circle your gender. F M

8. Please circle the range which includes your age

< 25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	50 +
------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	------

9. Please circle your degrees and indicate a major for each in the space provided.

DEGREE	MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY
B.S., B.A., B.Ed.	
M.S., M.A., M.Ed	
Ed S	
Ed.D., Ph D.	

10. Circle the appropriate range of years to indicate your experience in each appropriate area of certification.

<p>Early Childhood Teaching</p> <p>1-5</p> <p>6-10</p> <p>11-15</p> <p>16-20</p> <p>21 +</p>	<p>Elementary Teaching</p> <p>1-5</p> <p>6-10</p> <p>11-15</p> <p>16-20</p> <p>21 +</p>	<p>Secondary Teaching</p> <p>1-5</p> <p>6-10</p> <p>11-15</p> <p>16-20</p> <p>21 +</p>
<p>Special Education Teaching</p> <p>1-5</p> <p>6-10</p> <p>11-15</p> <p>16-20</p> <p>21 +</p>	<p>Elementary Administration</p> <p>1-5</p> <p>6-10</p> <p>11-15</p> <p>16-20</p> <p>21 +</p>	<p>Secondary Administration</p> <p>1-5</p> <p>6-10</p> <p>11-15</p> <p>16-20</p> <p>21 +</p>

I have no part in that task
 I delegate that task to someone else.
 I supervise someone else who does that task.
 I participate with others in doing that task.
 I do this task myself

To what degree do you actually...

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Principals. The items below are all related to the placement decisions for special students. For each item, determine the degree to which you are actually involved and mark the appropriate box (on the left side of the sheet, Part II - LRE: Actual Involvement) under the heading that most accurately describes that involvement. Once you have determined your actual involvement, please determine the degree to which you would be ideally involved and mark the appropriate box (on the right side of the sheet, Part III - LRE: Ideal Involvement) under the heading that most accurately describes that involvement.

PART III - LRE: Ideal Involvement

I have no part in that task
 I delegate that task to someone else
 I supervise someone else who does that task.
 I participate with others in doing that task.
 I do this task myself

To what degree would you ideally..

1. communicate district philosophy, goals, priorities of special students to staff and parents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. administer assessment instruments to students?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. schedule adequate staff time for pre-conference and conference team discussion relative to placement conference?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. arrange site, time and day for parent(s) of identified special student and IEP (Individual Education Plan) team's conference?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. attend placement conference?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. sign forms regarding placement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. notify parents of eligibility and arrangements for IEP conference?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. provide parents with a list of legal rights regarding special education procedural safeguards?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. identify personnel and facilities to best enhance placement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. arrange non-academic and extracurricular activities to be nonconflicting with placement?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. establish goals and objectives for student performance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. determine program needs and related services to be provided for student?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. acquire resources needed to ensure the effectiveness of IEP instructional guidelines?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. monitor the progress of special students in relation to the placement decisions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. identify availability of related services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, transportation, counseling services, and psychological services?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. demonstrate to staff how to characterize special children by learning descriptors, rather than by disabilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. keep abreast of changing legal requirements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. maintain required documentation concerning special education?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- I have no part in that task.
- I delegate that task to someone else
- I supervise someone else who does that task.
- I participate with others in doing that task.
- I do this task myself

To what degree do you actually...

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Principals. The items below are all related to the placement decisions for special students. For each item, determine the degree to which you are actually involved and mark the appropriate box (on the left side of the sheet, Part II - LRE: Actual Involvement) under the heading that most accurately describes that involvement. Once you have determined your actual involvement, please determine the degree to which you would be ideally involved and mark the appropriate box (on the right side of the sheet, Part III - LRE: Ideal Involvement) under the heading that most accurately describes that involvement.

**PART III - LRE:
Ideal Involvement**

- I have no part in that task.
- I delegate that task to someone else
- I supervise someone else who does that task.
- I participate with others in doing that task
- I do this task myself

To what degree would you ideally..

19. set up clear expectations for all affected teachers to understand the capabilities and needs of these students?
20. establish systems of incentives and recognition to encourage the progress toward placement goals?
21. create a climate of shared decision-making involving students, special educators, and teachers?
22. educate staff on possible conflict situations?
23. coordinate the development of annual and three year program evaluation?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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VITA

Sharon S. Park

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: A COMPARISON OF THE ACTUAL AND IDEAL INVOLVEMENT OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS IN PLACEMENT DECISIONS PERTAINING TO SPECIAL EDUCATION AND LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Major Field: Educational Administration

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Ft. Worth, Texas, the daughter of Kenneth and Elizabeth A. Webb; married to Jerry Park on June 13, 1964.

Education: Graduated from R. L. Paschal High School, Ft. Worth, Texas, May, 1961; received Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, in 1965; received Master of Education degree from Central State University, Edmond, Oklahoma, in 1979; completed requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at Oklahoma State University in July, 1990.

Professional Experience: Elementary Teacher, Lubbock Public Schools, Lubbock, Texas, 1965-67; Elementary Teacher, Garland (Dallas) Public Schools, Garland, Texas, 1969-71; Elementary/Secondary Teacher (Special Education and Reading), Oklahoma City Public Schools, 1979-88; Reading Professor, Oklahoma City Community College, 1986; Special Education Director/Teacher, McCloud Public Schools, McCloud, Oklahoma, 1989-1990.