SPEAK, REVIEW, CHANGE, REPEAT: AN ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE SURROUNDING DILEMMAS AT ADMISSION, REVIEW AND DISMISSAL MEETINGS

A Dissertation

by

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A & M University-Corus Christi and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the ways in which three parents of students with disabilities and three public school campus administrators negotiated dilemmas through discourse during Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings in a South Texas public school district.

The participants in this study included the stakeholders in ARD meetings who work together to construct Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for students with special needs. Direct participants were parents and administrators at the meeting while indirect participants were other stakeholders present at the meeting. Informed by Grounded Practical Theory and Action Implicative Discourse Analysis, this qualitative study explored the ways in which participants utilized various discursive positions to dis/agree with each other, reflect on their positions, and identify their ideals and roles in ARD meetings.

The findings of this study highlight the difference between the role participants play in ARD meetings and how they conceptualize their idealized situation and actions in these meetings. Discrepancies in idealization and practice were used as points of reflection to identify conceptual recommendations for conflict management. Additionally, findings indicated that participants' disposition and state of mind with which they entered the ARD meeting were key to the outcome of the meeting. Participants used various discursive strategies to manage their dilemmas. A shared point of dilemma was identified by parents and administrators that called for more parental participation, even if parental agreement was not achieved. Data revealed that participants often shared the same ideals but how such ideals manifested varied. Various dilemmas were identified that prevented the stakeholders from acting accordingly in what they

considered to be in the best interest of the student. For administrators these were constraints on time, resources, fear of litigation, and navigating a demanding workload. For parents, these were lack of understanding, communication, and not being considered as equal partners in their child's educational programming.

Implications for this study raise questions about academic training in teacher education and educational leadership programs. Moreover, issues of professional development and the role of discourse in conflict management are raised as a result of this study.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to children with special needs as they offer the rest of the world precious lessons in acceptance, determination, and the celebration of life. I thank God for the children with special needs that have blessed my life and I am grateful for the gifts they have given me such as laughter, play, patience, generosity, courage, curiosity, and unrestricted joy. It is the strength and insight that I gain from these children that fill my heart and fuel my drive for equity and respect on their behalf.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to acknowledge the parents and administrators who readily accepted me into their conversations, meetings and efforts related to collaboration. All of them, each in their own way, demonstrated a passion for supporting the success of students with special needs. I am humbled by their dedication to making school meaningful for children. I am honored to have had the opportunity to make their voices heard through efforts to make special education better, one ARD at a time.

My doctoral journey has been greatly enhanced by Educational Leadership faculty at TAMUCC. My deepest gratitude goes to my dissertation committee – Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, Dr. Lynn Hemmer, Dr. Lisa Comparini and Dr. Karen McCaleb – for their patience and belief in me. Dr. McCaleb recognized and invigorated my desire to bridge practice and research. Dr. Hemmer validated my work with quiet encouragement and thought provoking questions. Because of Dr. Comparini's expertise, I look forward to additional research in the area of discourse analysis. Dr. Bhattacharya's challenged me to grow academically, saw me through my personal epiphanies, accepted my uniqueness and simultaneously reined in my distractible desire to save the world. I am indebted to her for her loyalty, advocacy, positive spirit, expertise, and unfaltering support of my academic writing through humor, artwork, and idioms.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meeting is the cornerstone of the special education process in public schools. It is at this meeting that decisions and recommendations are made regarding special education services for students with disabilities. Information discussed includes the student's skills, limitations, performance, and needs, all of which are highly confidential. Only those with a legitimate educational interest in the needs and services of that student are allowed to participate in the meeting. Consequently, no one other than those in attendance at the ARD meeting is privy to what happens there.

The following exemplar script was created to provide the reader a glimpse into what happens at an ARD meeting. Identifiable information included in the vignette below is not based on any specific school or people. While information specific to the student is unique, the following topic of how much time a student with disabilities spends in a general education setting as opposed to a special education setting is a common one at ARD meetings.

Scene: An Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meeting for Martha, an 8 year old, second grade student diagnosed with Down's syndrome currently receiving special education services in a public school. She is eligible for special education services due to an intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment and speech impairment.

An ARD meeting is being held to review Martha's progress over the past year, and to create a plan of services for the upcoming school year. The meeting is being held in a small conference room on the school campus. There are eight people crowded around an oblong wooden table. Each person is seated in a plastic blue chair in the following order: CHARLOTTE, the campus Principal, PHOEBE, Martha's Parent, EMILY the Educational Diagnostician, SHELIA the Speech Language Pathologist, TERESA the Special Education

Teacher, GUS the General Education Teacher, MARK the Occupational Therapist and CATE, the Physical Education Teacher. There are windows on one wall that open to the school parking lot and a closed cabinet on another wall. The two remaining walls are bare. The meeting started at 2:00 pm, but the scene opens at 3:15 pm as the discussion approaches the last items on the agenda.

EMILY: *(in a cheerful voice)* Okay, we've reviewed Martha's progress. She's come a long way since starting school here when she was three. We've got goals and objectives that we agree on for her special education classes and her general education classes for the upcoming school year. She's improving in every area. Do I understand that correctly? *(Emily makes eye contact with each ARD Committee member. All members nod in polite agreement.)* Great! And based on the information shared today about her great progress, Martha's schedule of services is expected to continue as it is, and it is recommended that Martha remain in the second grade. Is that the committee's recommendation? *(All school staff quickly nod in agreement while looking at Emily who begins to type the minutes of the meeting. Those facing the window look outside while the others look at their lap or at the table as they shuffle papers.)*

PHOEBE: *(looking at Charlotte and Emily)* I disagree with that. I think Martha needs to spend more time in the regular classroom with regular kids. I want her to be more like those kinds of kids. And I don't want her in second grade next year. I want her moved back to the first grade so she can learn that first grade stuff better, and catch up with everyone else.

Silence envelopes the room while Charlotte and Emily immediately exchange looks of anxiety and then survey campus staff. Everyone either looks down at the table, out a window or shuffles papers. There is a pause while Emily and Charlotte both take noticeably deep breaths. They

exchange looks as if to non-verbally volley for who will respond to the parent's request. Emily speaks first.

EMILY: *(speaking to Phoebe in a less-than-cheerful voice)* So you want to move Martha backwards - to first grade - and have her spend more than two hours per day in a general education classroom, is that right?

PHOEBE: Yes, that's what I want. I mean, I know Martha has done okay this year, but I think she'll do better if she can go back to first grade and learn the basics again with the normal kids. I want her to go to PE with regular kids too. *(with increasing intensity in her voice)* She spends too much time with the other kinds of kids, and all she is learning is their bad habits like kicking, running away, and refusing to do her work. When she spends all her time with those kids she doesn't have any good examples to learn from. But I still want her to get the speech and other stuff- I know that's helping her a lot. And I still want her to ride the bus.

(As Phoebe is talking, Emily is listening and looking at her because Charlotte is busy taking notes. Sheila and Mark [Speech and OT] exert an audible sigh of relief after Phoebe's statement regarding speech and "other therapy." All other school staff continue to stare at the table, or look out the window.)

CHARLOTTE: We all agree that Martha has made good progress this year. I'm not sure that moving her backwards from second grade to first grade is educationally best for her. Also, we don't typically move students back to lower grades. It's not uncommon for students with disabilities to remain in the same grade for more than one year, which is what we are recommending for Martha. However, we are planning to increase the mastery level of her goals and objectives so we can continue to challenge her. (*Taking a breath and visually referencing everyone around the table except Phoebe.)* It will be beneficial for her to remain with the same

teachers, Teresa and Gus, because they already know her. They know her strengths they know how to work with her and they know how much progress she has made, so they will be able to really challenge her again next year as a second grader, (*turning towards the two teachers*) right Gus and Teresa?

(Gus and Teresa look at each other momentarily and then directly at Charlotte just long enough to make eye contact. They nod in agreement with small, courteous smiles on their faces and then immediately return their eyes to the table.)

CHARLOTTE: Plus, the data we reviewed in today's meeting indicates that Martha is learning. Remember, earlier this year, we had Martha in a general education second grade classroom for three hours. She didn't make as much progress, and she seemed to have a lot more behavior issues. We also tried having her go to regular PE and music. She seemed overwhelmed, and had a hard time keeping up. As a matter of fact, if you recall, we had issues in PE because Martha kept swinging the jump rope around and hitting other students. There were also times that she fell because she tried to jump when it was not her turn, right Cate?

CATE: Yes, I remember that. *(looking directly at Charlotte)* Martha is a sweet girl, and she tries really hard, but she has a hard time with the large groups that are in regular PE. It is hard for me to keep up with her, and the other 44 kids in there. Plus she doesn't understand turn-taking yet. She gets frustrated when she has to wait, and sometimes that turns into a temper tantrum. Then I have to stop the whole class so I can deal with her-

PHOEBE: *(interrupting)* Well that's because y'all need more adults in there. You can't handle 44 kids by yourself! Plus, the more time Martha spends with normal kids, the faster she will learn how to act like them.

(there is a pause while everyone looks expectantly at Charlotte for a response. Emily quickly begins to type. Charlotte's eyes quickly shift from person to person, and end up on the agenda in front of her.)

CHARLOTTE: Phoebe, we understand your request. I think we all want the same thing here – for Martha to continue to be successful in school. We are willing to consider your request, but at this time the data indicates that Martha's current instructional setting is working for her.

PHOEBE: *(in an audibly raised voice of frustration)* Working for her, or working for you? Martha can already do the things y'all have on that paper anyway. She needs to learn the stuff that the regular kids are learning, so she can get a job when she graduates. Y'all are just teaching her easy stuff, like the letters of her first name, when she needs to be learning harder stuff, like how to read a recipe, and sign her name in cursive.

(Phoebe makes direct eye contact with all ARD Committee members. Members shift in their seats, but no one looks up at Phoebe or each other. Emily's typing becomes the only sound heard.)

CHARLOTTE: *(Clearing her throat)* I think we've demonstrated- both through testing, and Martha's work samples- that she is working at her cognitive ability level, and making progress. As we mentioned earlier, if Martha masters the proposed goals and objectives, we will definitely come back to ARD to create new ones. *(Charlotte is interrupted by the campus bell that signals the end of the school day. Gus, Teresa and Cate look obviously at their watches and then to Charlotte with impatient expressions)* Phoebe, are you willing to allow us to start the next school year with the recommended schedule of services? We can come back to ARD to consider more time for general education after a few weeks into the school year.

(All ARD Committee members briefly look at Phoebe with respectful smiles on their faces, except for Emily, whom has not looked up since she started typing.

PHOEBE: (*looking down, sighs in frustration*) No – I don't want to have to come up here for another meeting. I miss enough work as it is. Are you going to move her back to first grade and into regular classes or not?

CHARLOTTE: That's not our recommendation at this time.

PHOEBE: Well then, I guess we're done here. *(Phoebe starts to stand. All of the school staff look panicked. They stare expectantly at Charlotte.)*

CHARLOTTE: Phoebe, we'd really like to work this out with you, but we understand that you disagree with our recommendation. We need to know exactly what you disagree with, please, and then we need to schedule a day and time to reconvene this ARD meeting within the next 10 school days. So, here is a piece of paper for you to write down what you disagree with, and if you have your planning calendar handy we can schedule the next ARD while everyone is here. Okay?

(Emily continues to type. The school staff shift in their chairs. Charlotte gets out her planner while Phoebe sits back down.)

PHOEBE: I don't have a "planner" *(making quotation gesture)*, but starting next week, I am off on Fridays. I want the meeting at the same time as this one; 2:00. And I need more than this one piece of paper to write down what I don't like about this meeting.

Background and Setting

The adverse impact of conflict in special education is notable in numerous ways, the most obvious of which is monetarily. In the year 2000, approximately 146 million dollars were spent on litigation related to special education (Mueller, Singer & Draper, 2008). The cost of a due process hearing ranges from $5,000 to $30,000 in 2000 (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). It is

reasonable to assume that today's costs are significantly higher. Parents and schools have collectively spent millions of dollars in court working to resolve disputes revolving around special education. The price of tension and distrust between parents and schools, with respect to broken interactions, shattered rapport, and fragmented communication is equally disparaging.

Cooperation between schools and parents is imperative in accomplishing student-centered decision making, as set forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act [IDEIA] (2004). Individual Education Program (IEP) team meetings provide the opportunity for partnerships between parents and schools, leading to consensus through collaboration (19 Texas Administrative Code [T.A.C] §89.1050). In Texas, the IEP team is known as the ARD Committee and the meeting is referred to as an Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meeting (TEA, 2012, p. 2). As this research took place in Texas, the terms ARD meeting and ARD Committee are used throughout this study. Intended to foster partnerships between parents and schools, these meetings are held to address how to best meet the educational needs of students with disabilities (Polloway & Patton, 1997; Rock, 2000). ARD meetings must be held annually, according the IDEIA. Additional meetings can be convened upon request by the student's parent, teachers, or school service providers if necessary, modifications are made to the special education services being provided (IDEIA, 2004). Required members of the ARD Committee include the parent of the child with a disability, a public school representative, a general education certified teacher who currently provides instruction to the student, and a person with special education certification (IDEIA, 2004). If the student with special needs is age 14 or older, s/he is also invited to be a part of the ARD Committee. Typically, a principal or assistant principal from the student's school serves as the public school representative. As the public school representative, the administrator is one who is

appropriately certified to provide or supervise specially designed instruction, is knowledgeable about general education curriculum, and is able to commit district resources to serve children with disabilities. Depending on the special education services being provided to the student, additional personnel may be required to attend the ARD meeting. Individuals who can provide expert knowledge and are able to interpret assessments, such as educational diagnosticians are frequently present at ARD meetings. Additional examples of such personnel include a Speech Language Pathologist, an Occupational Therapist, a Physical Therapist or an Adaptive Physical Education Teacher (34 C.F.R. §300.321). A parent is also entitled to invite additional people to meetings, such as advocates, family members, or a legal representative (IDEIA, 2004).

In an ARD meeting, committee members provide recommendations for the student's program of services based on their expertise and experiences with the student. It is the committee, not any individual member that makes the final decisions and recommendations regarding services for the student. Working as a team, the input of all ARD Committee members is valuable. While school staff are considered experts in both determining the student's educational needs and in providing the appropriate services, parents are considered the "contributing authority" (Cooper & Rascon, 1994, p. 350) regarding their child. In other words, parents may not be experts in areas of special education services, but they are the authority on their child, thus they contribute to the decision making from that context. As a part of the decision making process information from multiple sources is shared and considered as the basis for decisions. Although some may consider each person's input to have equal influence on decision making, Harry (1992) notes that typical ARD procedure is that staff make decisions, and parents give consent. Similarly, it has been reported that decision making at ARD meetings is mostly influenced by assessment results, educational expertise and compliance with

governmental standards. Parents, meanwhile, endure stress as they struggle to advocate for their child in a meeting they may not understand or feel a part of (Harry, 1992; Hess, 2006; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1997).

Incongruities between the experiences and expectations of parents and school staff contribute to differences in perspectives (Fish, 2009). While not be framed as right or wrong, differences that evolve between the passion of parenthood and the intensity of service expertise can unintentionally evolve into a dilemma. Cloke (2006) considers conflict to be an opportunity for transformation; a chance to learn more about ourselves rather than allowing conflict to define who we are:

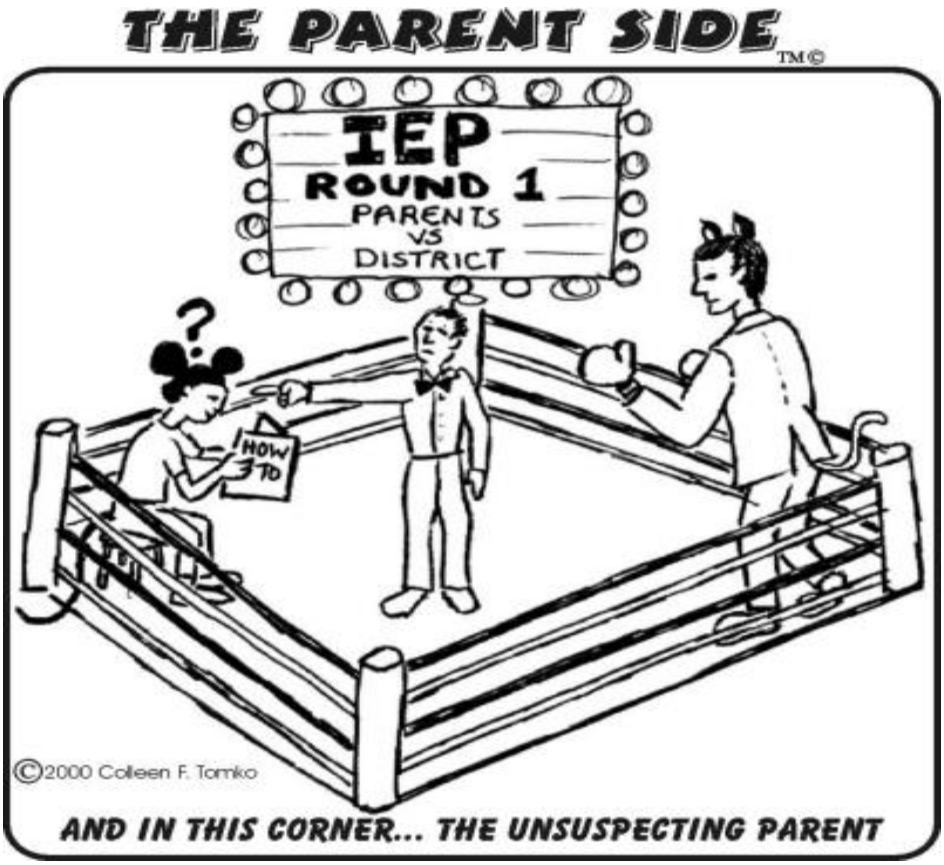
> Conflict is therefore simply the sound made by cracks in a system, regardless of whether the system is personal, relational, familial, organizational, social, economical, or political. Alternatively, it is a warning light pointing at something in our character, relationship, or environment that is not working, either for us or for others. It can be an opportunity for rethinking and innovation, or the birth pain of a new way of being or behaving that is waiting to be born. (p. 18)

Otherwise stated, conflict can yield positive results. While the term *conflict* implies dissention, the term *dilemma* suggests choice. Kollock (1998) refers to dilemmas as, "…the tension between individual and collective rationality" (p. 183). There are multiple categories of dilemmas with the main differentiation being ethical and social dilemmas. For the purposes of this study, *dilemma* is a reference to the social dilemma labeled as the Assurance Dilemma (Kollock, 1998). This dilemma, according to Kollock (1998) involves two people. While there are more than two people in an ARD meeting, the current study considers the parent and the administrator as the two key parties involved, making the Assurance Dilemma appropriate. The

Assurance Dilemma is based on the fact that one person is willing to cooperate as long as there is assurance that the other person(s) will also cooperate (Kollock, 1998). In other words, mutual cooperation leads to a better outcome than individual decision making. Trust the key issue in resolving the Assurance Dilemma.

Dilemmas in ARD meetings can arise for numerous reasons, such as eligibility for special education services, the student's educational placement, discipline, instruction, and resources (Fish, 2006; Fisher, 2009; Valle & Aponte, 2002). The connection between schools and parents of students with disabilities, "… is like a marriage without the possibility of divorce" (Wright, 2002, p. 11). In other words, parents and schools are inextricably connected based on educational services for the children. As a result, a common source of conflict is the difference between the perceived role and actual role of the ARD Committee members (Davis, 2011). While the goals of both parties may be the same, differences in how to accomplish that goal can create conflict. Parents and campus administrators can get locked in adversarial positions, unwilling to let go of their beliefs and expectations.

It is not unreasonable for parents to consider themselves at a disadvantage at ARD meetings. As suggested in the following illustration, sometimes parents step into the ring of special education without *knowing the ropes* which can include procedures, lingo, and protocol.



("Special Education in the Roxbury Township," 2010.)

This portrayal of the district as a cat and the parent as a mouse implies that special education can be a game that includes chasing and taunting between an aggressor and its prey, rendering the parent as the victim. Although not an accurate representation for all situations, this rendering underscores the ways in which conflicts can arise in ARD meetings.

Sheehey (2006) asserted that parents may feel alienated, pressured, resentful, defeated, and intimidated at ARD meetings as they are typically outnumbered by professionals, and may not know everyone at the meeting unless introductions are made. Data for the 2010 school year revealed that 64% of parents noted that schools "always" provided information to help them assist their child, 28% indicated that it happened "sometimes," and 8% indicated that it "never" occurred (TEA, 2011). As required by law, school staff recommendations for special education

services are based on educational experiences with the student, content expertise, assessment data, student progress, and the need for "specially designed instruction" (IDEIA, 2004; C.F.R.§300.39 (a)) Parent requests typically revolve around services that meet their own expectation of "success" for their child, based on personal experiences and preferences. Fundamental differences such as "need" versus "want" can lead to disagreement and opposition.

When faced with school-based professionals whose expertise and recommendations greatly shape educationally-based services for their child, parents may lean on the law for support in enforcing their own choices (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). By referring to their legal rights as parents, individuals can make an effort to establish themselves as equals with school experts. While the law provides informed access to the process of collaboration, it does not guarantee consensus and as a result, "…a disparity exists between the intent of the law and the realization of the law" (Valle & Aponte, 2002, p. 474). IDEIA (2004) sets forth the expectations and mandates regarding special education services in public schools. While the members of the ARD Committee can disagree, it is the school's right and responsibility to implement the plan that it deems most appropriate for the student following the written notification to parents of its intention to do so (19 T.A.C. §89.1050).

A seminal case that shaped special education services in public school occurred in 1989, Daniel R.R. vs. State Board of Education. In this case, the parents were unhappy that their child with special needs, Daniel, did not receive enough instruction in a general education classroom setting. Consequently, they became more involved in the ARD process. In response to the concern that the ARD Committee was unable to resolve to their satisfaction, Daniel's parents followed through with all legal recourse by filing a due process hearing, which eventually went to the appellate court. In this case, the court ruled in favor of the school district and determined

that in regards to the least restrictive environment, an appropriate environment is more important than placement in the general education classroom. Additionally, this court mandated that school districts must utilize the variety of settings in providing a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Finally, by establishing a two-part test, the court set the precedent for determining if the least restrictive setting met the following required criteria: (1) Can the student receive educational benefit from the general education setting with the use of supplemental aides and services? (2) Has the school mainstreamed the child to the maximum extent appropriate? Thus, this case demonstrates that although not all situations need to be litigious, parental involvement can have a bearing on the outcome of services for students.

Responsibility for knowing and following the law falls under the duty of schools. As the fifth step in her 12-step process for "fixing" special education, Freedman (2009) advocates for changing parents' role from law enforcers back to parents. She explains, "Relying on parents to enforce the law is problematic on many levels. For starters, it often destroys the relationship between the school and home. It encourages schools to abandon their natural role as advocates for students. (p. 60). If school administrators rely on parents to enforce the law, instead of the having the ARD Committee *follow* the law, the committee can become disempowered. This may unintentionally authorize the parent to play the role of delegator, rather than contributor. Yielding to parents out of fear of retribution can lead to making decisions based on compliance instead of students' best interests.

Some laws involving special education imply a tone of entitlement for parents. Freedman (2009) asserts that parents of students with disabilities are the only people with rights in schools other than the students themselves. Both IDEIA (2004) and the Texas Administrative Code ensure parents the opportunity to immediately seek legal assistance when they disagree with

services that a public school provides. IDEIA (2004) requires that public schools provide children with disabilities a "free, appropriate public education" (20 U.S.C. 14101(9); 19 C.F.R. §300.317). This phrase presents an example of how differences manifest themselves through different definitions of "appropriate." Parents want what they perceive to be the best for their child, while public schools are required to provide what is "appropriate" for the child to make "reasonable progress" (Freedman, 2009, p. 25). As a result, parents are "forced to advocate for their children against the school…exactly what the law mandates" (Freedman, 2009, p. 25). With the strain of litigation looming as a potential outcome, pressure to keep parents happy in order is notable for administrators. Such pressure can result in actions being motivated by defensiveness or pacification, both of which impede any sense of trust and a good education is hard to achieve without trust – the basic trust that forms the foundation of appropriate education…without basic trust, achieving a good education is much harder" (Freedman, 2009, p. 27).

The language of special education documents may encourage parents' sense of entitlement. For example, the document titled "Notice of Procedural Safeguards; Rights of Parents of Students with Disabilities" (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2012) must be provided to parents of students with disabilities annually (IDEIA, 2004). More than seven pages of this 18 page document describe procedures relate to legal proceedings in response to parent disagreement with public schools, while only two or three sentences directly mention collaboration between the two entities. Such an imbalance does not seem to prioritize consensus building. Instead, it points to an inconsistency between what is expected and how that expectation can be met. Another document titled, "A Guide to the Admission, Review and Dismissal Process" (TEA, 2013b), is provided to parents by schools when parents refer their

child for an evaluation regarding eligibility for special education services. Six of its 20 pages contain information regarding non-consensus and litigation options. These documents, perceived as snapshots of special education law, seem to communicate a message of enforcement based on prerogative.

However, entitlement does not come without responsibilities. A demonstration of expected collaboration from parents was noted in a legal case from Houston, Texas (*Student, B/N/F v. Houston ISD*, 2009). The parents involved with the case filed for a special education due process hearing, claiming that the public school district did not offer an appropriate placement for their child. The case ended in favor of the school district based on lack of cooperation from the parent. The hearing officer noted, "…the district was not responsible for a lack of collaboration with the parent when the parent unreasonably refused to cooperate…" Therefore, both parents and schools must be conscientious and cooperative participants in order to minimize litigious conflict.

Efforts at both state and national levels have been implemented to not only resolve disputes in special education, but to also prevent them as reported by the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE, n.d.). Although referred to by various labels, the concept of facilitation is prevalent in numerous states and is recommended as a primary conflict resolution strategy involving a third party to deal with "fully evolved" conflicts (Feinberg, Beyer, & Moses, 2002, p. 22). The Facilitated Individual Education Program (FIEP) meeting was created by the United States Department of Education and recognized by CADRE as an effort to prevent disputes between schools and parents (CADRE, n.d.).

> Facilitation is a voluntary process that can be used when parties in an Individual Education Plan (IEP), Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) or other meeting agree that the presence of a neutral third party would facilitate communication and problem solving. It is most often used when there is a history of contentious interactions between the family and school, the participants anticipate that they will be unable to reach agreement on critical issues, or when a meeting is expected to be particularly complex and controversial (CADRE, n.d.).

The Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education recognizes five exemplar states in the area of dispute resolution in special education (CADRE, n.d.). Four of these states legislatively support facilitation as an early dispute resolution option. Texas is not one of these exemplar states. Despite state and national level endeavors to resolve the issue, conflict continues to be rampant in special education as evidenced in numerous studies (Besinaiz, 2009; Davis, 2011; Newman, 2005; Reiman et al., 2007; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011).

Rationale for the Study

Special education is the most frequently litigated area of public education (Besinaiz, 2009). Conflict in ARD meetings can lead to litigation that can result in negative relationships between parents and campus administrators. Therefore, studies that aim to resolve conflict are critical to the field of special education. Current research related to conflict during ARD meetings primarily focuses on parent participation, legal procedure, and the treatment of parents by schools (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2004; Cooper & Rascon, 1994; Fish, 2008, 2009; Hammond, Ingalls, & Trussell, 2008; Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000; Mueller, 2009; Newman, 2005; Rock, 2000; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011; Sheehey, 2006). Many studies offer generic, prescriptive solutions, and preventive measures for how parents and campus administrators should behave. Literature about conflict and responses to conflict in

special education is limited (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Little has been written about sustaining collaboration in the face of conflict.

Discourse-based communicative differences between parents and campus administrators during ARD meetings are also underrepresented in the current literature. Likewise, minimal studies have been done that specifically address how conflicts at ARD meetings were resolved based on information gained from those involved in the conflict (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Where and how conflict is successfully addressed is the key impetus for this study.

This study explores dilemmas through the lens of discourse, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how dialogue affects dilemma from the perspectives of both the parent of a student with disabilities and campus administrators. The results of this study may serve as exemplars for people who would like to resolve conflict, but do not possess the communicative tools to do so. The outcomes of this study may also serve to bridge the inconsistency between what each party expects of the other, and illuminate potential resolutions to address conflict as a barrier to meaningful collaboration. Additionally, the outcomes of the study reveal practical implications for discourse in addressing conflict between parents and campus administrators at ARD meetings. The expansion of participants' repertoire of how to manage differences in ways that extend beyond traditionally reactive methods is another way this study contributes to the minimization of conflict. Along with reducing legal costs for both parents and school districts, successfully solving dilemmas at annual ARD meetings can advance reciprocal understanding, improve relationships, and ultimately support the educational success of the student with disabilities.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand the ways in which three parents of students with disabilities and three public school campus administrators negotiate dilemmas through discourse during ARD meetings in a South Texas public school district.

Research questions that will guide this study include:

1. How do campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities describe their respective dilemmas during their participation in ARD meetings?
2. What interactional strategies are utilized by campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities when handling dilemmas at ARD meetings?
3. What expectations do campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities have about their roles in ARD meetings?

Operational Definitions

- *Admission, Review, and Dismissal* (ARD) – term used to describe the process in Texas that guides the implementation of special education. ARD meetings are held to review and/or plan educational programming for a student with disabilities; an ARD Committee is the decision-making group of people that attend an ARD meeting.
- *Disability* – an alteration of capacity, an impairment identified based on evaluation that limits personal, social or occupational independence; an overarching term for the fourteen categories of eligibility for special education services as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004 (34 C.F.R. §300.8, 2006).
- *Parent* – biological or adoptive parent, foster parent, legal guardian, or appointed surrogate parent who is legally responsible for educational decisions for the child with disabilities (TEA, 2012b, p.2).

- *Public school campus administrator* – person serving in an administrative role on the campus of a public school, typically a principal or an assistant principal
- *Special education services* - specific services, including the duration and frequency, provided at no charge to a student with disabilities as determined by an ARD Committee. Special education services may include speech therapy, occupational therapy, or modified curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

Grounded Practical Theory (GPT) is a theory more concerned with "what *ought* to be" (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 249), than the discovery of explanations about phenomena as in scientific theory. What distinguishes GPT from other approaches is the fact that a real-life communicative event is studied, and used to develop ideas that directly impact that event in the future. GPT addresses actual problems in "communication praxis" (Craig & Tracy, 2003, p. 250). In other words, the goal of GPT is "the development of ideas that will contribute to the cultivation of existing communication practices" (Craig & Tracy, 2003, p. 1). Theories regarding the practical application of skills, actions and determinations are grounded in the processes of evaluating actions, and determining ideal situations. Therefore, GPT relies heavily on reflection from both the researcher and the participants.

Craig and Tracy (2003) claim that, in order to be considered beneficial, normative theory must be grounded in practice. They define *practice* as a set of communication exchanges that occur in a specialized place among particular kinds of people (Tracy, 2005). "Practice" is a term that could describe any setting where communication interactions serve an explicit purpose and involve specific types of people, such as a school board meeting, a 911 call, or a courtroom. For this study, the practice will be ARD meetings.

A unique characteristic of GPT is the promulgation of communication as a practical discipline (Craig & Tracy, 1995). The act of communication is frequently taken for granted. However, GPT approaches communication as a purposeful event. "…communication per se has become a meaningful practice for us…communication as a practice transforms our understanding of the theory-practice relationship" (Craig, 2006, p. 41). Consequently, by addressing communication as a discipline, instead of an activity, the expectations, actions, and experiences of participants within the communicative event being studied are utilized as the basis for improving exchanges within that event in the future.

According to GPT, communicative problems evolve from the participants' pursuits of multiple, and typically competing goals, which result in conflict that impedes further discourse (Craig & Tracy, 2003). Communicative events are recreated through the problem-centered model of GPT. Practices are "reconstructed on three levels: (1) the technical level, (2) the problem level, and (3) the philosophical level" (Craig & Tracy, 2003, p. 253). At the problem level the specific issue is identified and labeled and the technical level includes discursive techniques and strategies utilized to manage those problems. The philosophical level constructs ideals of the participants based on observations and data from levels one and two. With dialogue being the primary method of action at an ARD meeting, GPT is an appropriate way to examine how participants handle dilemmas through discursive interactions.

Methodology

This study is informed by qualitative research. Qualitative research is a categorical term for various types of studies that are intended to generate in-depth understanding within the context of the study. It results in "…science-based evidence that can inform policy and procedure in special education" (Brantlinger, Jiminez, Klinger, Pugach, and Richardson (2005), p. 195) by exploring participants' attitudes, opinions, beliefs and reactions to such contexts.

Additionally, qualitative research is intended to "…produce evidence based on the exploration of specific context and particular individuals. It is expected that readers will see similarities to their situations and judge the relevance of the information produced to their own circumstances" (Brantlinger et al., 2005, p. 203). By revealing the perspectives of the people directly involved in the processes, qualitative research contributes to the field of special education through increased understanding about how discourse shapes the experiences of the participants (Brantlinger et al., 2005). As a result, a qualitative approach is appropriate for this study.

Qualitative studies typically adopt an emic perspective. I have been involved with special education services in public schools for 15 years, and have served on ARD Committees in every role except the parent. These experiences allow me to use my experience as an insider to aid in my gain more in-depth understanding. This meets the emic specification of Actions Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA), an analytical framework often used in GPT which is elaborated further in chapter three.

The data collection methods for this study included interviews, document analysis, videotapes, and observations. The data collection tools were appropriate based on the normative and inductive nature of this study. These methods are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Data collection ranged over a period of five months. The primary means of data collection for this study included observations and videotapes of ARD meetings conducted on a public school campus. Individual interviews were held with each direct participant as soon as possible following an ARD meeting, to gain an intimate understanding of their experiences at a location selected by the participant. Additionally, documents such as ARD meeting transcripts, ARD meeting agendas, interview transcripts, district procedures, and documents provided by direct

participants were analyzed. Supplementary sources of data included journaling, memoing, member checks, and peer-debriefing.

Action-Implicative Discourse Analysis, (AIDA), served as the analytical framework for this study. The focus of this framework differs from traditional discourse analysis by its emphasis on describing the problem, labeling the communicative strategies used to manage the problem, and identifying the "ideals-in-use within existing communicative practices" (Tracy, 2005, p. 301). This framework requires that the researcher have an in-depth understanding about a practice that can only be derived from either direct engagement in the practice or prolonged, encompassing study of the practice. The researcher is able to ground the study's outcomes in the real-life experiences and expectations of the study's participants, referring to their input, to determine the "ideal" practice. The goal of AIDA is to have those involved in the practice thoughtfully reflect on how to resolve conflict that may arise in the future (Tracy, 2005). This goal can be accomplished by creating a view of the problem, labeling strategies, and identifying ideals of a practice. Effective conflict resolution requires effective analysis, which includes identifying the parties involved, and accurately identifying the conflict (Bradley, 2005). Furthermore, identifying the sources of conflict is equally important to effective conflict resolution, and involves consideration of each participant's goals, attitudes, preferences, values, role expectations, and perspectives. Through AIDA, it is expected that understanding constructed as a result of analysis and reflection might inspire the participants to take actions that minimize conflicts.

Action Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA) was developed to support the construction of Grounded Practical Theory (GPT) and mirror its normative principle (Tracy 1995). Through AIDA, interactions between people in different categories (such as parent,

judge, or reporter), or between people serving different roles within the same communicative practice, are studied in an effort to identify problems that arise as the result of differing points of view. AIDA is a type of discourse analysis that is best suited for communication practices in institutional settings, such as actively involved participants, mini-speeches, presentations, opportunities for disagreement, and the expectations for decisions at the end of a practice. Thus, AIDA is suitable for use in ARD meetings.

AIDA involves the selection of dialogue for examination, transcription, analysis and keeping in mind that, "…selecting stretches of discourse to be transcribed is a theoretically shaped activity" (Tracy, 2005, p. 310). To put it simply, AIDA focuses on interactions in which participants experience uneasiness, tension, or conflict (Tracy, 2005). With tension and dissention not being uncommon during ARD meetings, such portions of discourse will be ample. Both GPT and AIDA aim to refine communication in order to provide guidance for improving practices. Likewise, both emphasize practicality. In the arena of special education, there is always room for improvement, making GPT and AIDA appropriate for this study.

Significance and Limitations of the Study

An ARD meeting is the cornerstone event for decision-making and the implementation of special education services. Collaboration between parents and campus administrators can be difficult when conflict is inadequately addressed, or ignored. Minimizing conflict and failing to deal with it constructively present roadblocks to collaboration (Newman, 2005). An investigation of the experiences and perceptions of Special Education Directors in Texas regarding due process hearings in Texas found that lack of communication was a pervasive issue (Besinaiz, 2009, p.69). In order for participants' experiences to be positive and productive, making effective communication a priority at ARD meetings is imperative. Understanding how discourse impacts conflict between parents and administrators at ARD meetings has many

benefits, such as improving consensus and support of special education services for the student, reducing litigation costs for both schools and parents, increasing innovation in problem solving, improving experiences at annual ARD meetings, aligning expectations of all ARD Committee members, and informing all parties of available strategies for facilitating positive resolutions of dilemmas. As a result, the potential significance of this study permeates many areas of special education.

Given that neither special education laws, nor procedures, are expected to be nullified any time soon, conflict can be expected to continue. In order to understand what role discourse plays in conflicts at ARD meetings, this study is designed to develop practical, implementable concepts of how to improve such dilemmas. These theories will be based on the experiences of parents and administrators who participate in the study. Ideally, ARD meetings should allow parents and school staff to collaborate, in order to provide appropriate special education services for students with special needs (Fish, 2008). Through participants' critical reflection, the outcomes of this qualitative inquiry reveal discursive strategies that either enhanced the process and outcomes of ARD meetings or have the potential for desirable outcomes.

The results of this study conceptually ground ways in which both parents and administrators could address discord at ARD meetings. To resolve a conflict constructively calls for participants to have "knowledge and skills to produce positive outcomes" (Bradley, 2005, p. 171). A resolution occurs when "disputants are satisfied with outcomes, their relationships are maintained and possibly improved, and their ability to resolve future conflicts in a constructive manner is increased" (Bradley, 2005, p. 171). The most immediate benefits of this study include ongoing learning for the parent and the school administrator, an increase in mutual understanding, and enhanced cooperative decision making resulting in appropriate services

gained and implemented for students with disabilities. Additionally, findings of this study have relevance for training, especially in professional development sessions, teacher education and education leadership programs in terms of addressing various ways of understanding stakeholder positions, communication strategies, and creating in-depth understanding of how discourses shapes the ways in which people respond to each other.

Limitations of this study include the scope of the research. To foster in-depth understanding of the information, realistic timelines and small samples size was used. Data gathered involved limited numbers of volunteer participants centralized to one South Texas public school district. This study is a modest exploration of the experiences of parents and administrators, focused on their communication. Given the limited scope of the research, the types of special education services deliberated at the ARD meetings will be random and cannot possibly encompass the totality of issues that arise during these meetings. Furthermore, since participation in the study was voluntary, information gained was limited by what participants chose to share. Due to my position as a Director of Special Education in a nearby public school district, participants might not have always been forthcoming with information.

While this study is intended to provide insight into how parents and campus administrators can positively influence the special education process of ARD meetings through discourse, there are margins within which the findings of this research can be transferable. As a qualitative instrument, the goal of this study is not to indiscriminately apply the findings to any other ARD meeting without consideration of the unique circumstances and the specific parameter of this study. Attempting to generalize the findings of this study may lead to frustration and unexpected outcomes. Thus, the reader should consider the particular elements of this study, and draw informed conclusions. The outcomes of this study could potentially

contribute to the reflective development of strategies for ARD stakeholders to improve collaboration, thereby increasing consensus-building opportunities at ARD meetings.

Understanding how discourse contributes to dilemmas can be crucial to minimizing and resolving conflict at ARD meetings. However, developing such an understanding requires that those involved in the communicative event recognize their role regarding the impact of discourse. As a result, reframing one's approach to conflict must be prioritized above personal agendas, perceptions of entitlement, or "I win-you lose" paradigms.

Although some degree of conflict is inevitable, participants contribute to a greater understanding of how practical actions can be utilized to successfully address conflict. Through reflection about their role in exploring discourse as a tool, parents and administrators can fulfill not only the expectations of the law, but also the overarching goal of special education, which is to provide a free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities through collaboration.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I provided a brief background of regulations related to special education, with a focus on ARD meetings. I reviewed the legislative expectation of consensus in ARD meetings, and how conflict can result when agreement is not reached. I clarified the importance of discourse in efforts to minimize conflict, reduce litigation and sustain relationships between parents and campus administrators, two key players in the decision making process. I provided the rationale and purpose for my research, posed the questions that guide this study, and defined key terms. I also explained the theoretical framework of Grounded Practical Theory, and justified its application to this study. I described data collection and analysis methods. Finally, I discussed the significance and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I review the history of federal laws related to special education, the expectations of such laws, and how these expectations may or may not be met in the public school settings, in regard to Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meetings. The purpose of this review is to reveal the communicational dilemmas faced in ARD meetings and the role that discourse plays in shaping those dilemmas. Current contributions to conflict at ARD meetings and best practices related to preventing, managing and resolving such conflicts are also examined. Additionally, this literature review will establish a need for studying how discourse affects conflict between parents of students receiving special education services and public school campus administrators, specifically principals or assistant principals, at ARD meetings.

Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act (IDEIA)

Although it now seems conventional, educating students with disabilities in public schools is a practice that is less than 50 years old. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) is the latest version of the most prolific federal law related to public school services for students with disabilities. In 1966, Congress established the Bureau for Education of the Handicapped under the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act. This Bureau earmarked federal funds for multiple initiatives in order to fulfill the government's duty of educating students with disabilities resulting in the Education of the Handicapped Act, P.L. 91-230, of 1970 (USDOE, n.d., para 4). Only five years later, in 1975, changes were made to the Education of Handicapped Act which lead to in Congress enacting the first federal law to essentially guarantee students with disabilities, ages three to 21, the right to access a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). Public Law 94-142, also known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (USDOE, n.d., para 8) established that students with

disabilities should no longer be educated in isolation from their non-disabled peers. The intent of the EAHCA, can be summarized in the following points:

- Ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them…a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs
- Ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents…are protected
- Assist States and localities… to provide for the education of all children with disabilities
- Assist States in the implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families
- Assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate all children with disabilities

(IDEIA, 2004, Part A § 601 (d))

In 1990, 15 years after it was first enacted, EAHCA was revised and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997, § 614) (USDOE, n.d., para 1). As evident in the law's revised title, revisions included a paradigm shift from focusing on a disability to focusing on the individual. Changes in terminology within the law substituted the terms "individuals" instead of "children" and "with disabilities" instead of "handicapped" (IDEA, 1997, § 614). In order to remain effective, ongoing modifications to this law were foreseeable.

Within seven years another revision occurred, and in 1997 substantial amendments were enacted (NICHY, 1998, p. 1). These revisions mandated participation in state and district assessment systems for students with disabilities. They also specified what should be included in evaluations for special education eligibility. Additionally, they denoted changes in disciplinary

practices for students with disabilities. Finally, they included specifications related to how special education services must be documented and provided (NICHY, 1998, p. 2). These changes demonstrate how the law became increasingly more prescriptive over time.

Three additional amendments require attention concerning this study. The first provided a mandate for parent participation in decision-making related to school services for children with disabilities. A second key amendment of IDEA 1997 explicitly states that parents must also be involved in decisions regarding the educational placement of their child (IDEA, 1997, § 614). Although parent participation was encouraged under IDEA in 1990, IDEA 1997 expanded the role of parents from voluntary participants to required members of Individual Educational Program (IEP) Teams (IDEA, 1997, § 614; Fish, 2008; Kalyanpur, Harry & Skrtic, 2000; Rock, 2000. Although undoubtedly intended to increase parental involvement, the requirement that parents be involved in decision making added a tone of compliance. Also, parents being involved in the ARD meeting because the law says they must be seemed set the stage for conflict opportunities.

A third amendment in IDEA 1997 addressed resolving disputes between parents and public schools. Mediation in the context of special education can generally be described as a state funded process in which a mediator serves as an impartial party to work with both parents and public school officials to reach agreement on issues of contention (TEA, 2012). Cost, procedures, mediator qualifications, and confidentiality were all delineated by IDEA, 1997 (NICHY, 1998). Although seemingly a positive step toward gaining consensus, this process placed a mandatory, state-funded burden on school districts. However, this version of IDEA did not require parents to participate.

In December 2004, IDEA became IDEIA; the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act when it was amended yet again to address the following areas related to the education of students with disabilities:

- high expectations
- stronger roles and responsibilities of parents
- coordinating services among agencies
- the provision of special education services in the regular classroom setting as appropriate
- high quality professional development
- whole-school scientifically-based programs
- reduction of paperwork
- The use of technology to maximize students' access to learning (IDEIA, 2004).

This revision yielded a multitude of changes, including eligibility criteria for the category of Specific Learning Disability, Individual Education Program (IEP) requirements, discipline related to students receiving special education services, attorney's fees related to due process hearings, and the school district's required dissemination of the document titled "Notice of Procedural Safeguards" (TEA, 2013a). Changes such as these demonstrated that improving educational services for students with disabilities was the intention of IDEIA.

IDEIA (2004) also introduced the need for parental consent for special education services and options for resolving conflict between parents and public schools. Such changes reiterate that "…one of the things Congress sought to do when it reauthorized IDEIA in 2004 was make

the special education field less contentious" ("School officials," 2010, p 4). Under IDEA 1997, if a school district sought parental consent for an initial evaluation for special education eligibility and the parent refused, the district had the option to file a due process hearing in order to fulfill its duty to evaluate a child in an area of suspected disability (NICHY, 1998, p. 22). IDEIA 2004 afforded parents the right to refuse consent for an initial evaluation. (34 C.F.R §300.300). This introduced a loophole into the system as public school districts are legally required to make efforts to evaluate children suspected of having a disability. However, parents may obstruct this process by refusing to consent. Furthermore, the option for parents to later file a due process hearing based on claims of failure to identify a student with a suspected disability continues to be a possibility.

The newly reauthorized IDEIA gave school districts the opportunity to resolve a parent's complaint without going through mediation or a due process hearing. (IDEIA, 2004; 34 C.F.R. §300.510 (a) (1)). In the new resolution process, once a school district is made aware that a parent has filed a due process hearing, the district has 15 days to meet with the parent to develop a resolution plan, and another 15 days to settle the issue (IDEIA, 2004; 34 C.F.R. §300.510). This early intervention tool is another option created to support collaboration between parents and school districts and reduce litigation expenses. Although the resolution process is required by law, the actual resolution session can be waived by the parent, by the school district, or both parties (IDEIA, 2004; 34 C.F.R. §300.510), in which case, the next step toward conflict resolution is to either pursue mediation or file for a due process hearing (34 C.F.R. §300.532). Even with these multiple and diverse options in place for achieving collaboration, there is no guarantee of consensus.

Conflict in Special Education

Communication between education professionals and parents is essential for developing effective educational programs for students (Rock, 2000). Conflict can arise when multiple people are required to agree on an issue for which they each have a vested interest in, and are held accountable for. This is particularly true in the arena of special education, as it continues to be a nationwide issue of concern for educators, legislators, and researchers (Feinberg, Beyer & Moses, 2002; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Mueller, Singer & Draper, 2008). Hammond, Ingalls & Trussell (2008) concur that parent participation in the special education process has historically been problematic, and continues to be an area of concern. There were more than 9,800 due process hearing requests at the national level in 1998, which rose to over 11,000 in the year 2000 (Mueller, Singer, & Draper, 2008b). With multiple people in an ARD meeting, there are multiple perspectives and diverse knowledge, which may lead to differing expectations. When expectations are different, but members are expected to reach agreement, dilemmas may arise, that stifle consensus. Conflicts can occur at any point during the ARD meeting. "Conflict is a part of the human condition and it is inevitable. Conflict itself is not always the problem; rather, the way conflict is handled and the outcomes of the conflict are problematic" (Lake & Billingsley, 2000, p. 241). Hence, how a disagreement is managed can determine whether or not that conflict will escalate, deescalate, or be neutralized.

Educational research literature is rich with information regarding conflict between parents and schools related to special education. Mueller, Singer and Draper (2008) assert that the majority of conflict occurs during ARD meetings. Analysts working with Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) identified three major areas of conflict in special education. How services are designed; service delivery; and relationships between school administrators and parents (Feinberg, Beyer & Moses, 2002). Multiple works

echoed this third source of conflict, and provided more specificity by naming the "disqualification," "dismissal," "neglect," and "devaluing" of parental input as contributing to conflict (Hammond, Ingalls & Trussell, 2008); Kalyanpur, Harry & Skrtic, 2000; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Rock, 2000; Valle & Aponte, 2002). Framed as barriers to collaboration, Kalyanpur, Harry & Skrtic (2000) and Sheehey (2006) identified additional issues related to dissention in ARD meetings:

- differences in knowledge
- contrasting family traditions
- equity versus value-inequity
- individual rights versus social obligations
- choice versus roles
- professionals dominating the meetings
- IEPs developed with no regard for parent contribution

Many of these issues involve discourse. For example, when families and school officials have contrasting family traditions, one party (the parent or the administrator) may consider it acceptable to interrupt others, while the other party may perceive interruptions as rude and dismissive (Kalyanpur, Harry & Skritc, 2000). Even in this simplified example, such incongruity between intention and perception can easily lead to anger, intolerance, and discord.

Three dynamics that impede communication between schools and family members of students with special needs at ARD meetings are the insufficient opportunities for parents to provide input regarding data and decisions, the various perspectives of individual ARD

Committee members toward student issues, and the limited understanding of teachers about student needs (Hammond, Ingalls & Trussell, 2008). The first two of these involve collaboration and perspective, both of which involve either intentional dialogue or the incidental absence of it or indirect discourse. For example, if input is not explicitly requested from parents, it may suggest that their contributions are not wanted or important. Whether intentional or not, neglecting to include parents in planning and decision-making can invite parental opposition to the process.

Lake and Billingsley (2000) conducted one of the few studies to investigate general causes of conflict between parents and schools in special education. Through their grounded theory approach, they were able to identify elements that escalate and deescalate conflict from the perspectives of parents, the campus administrators, and mediators. These were sorted into eight categories: "discrepant views of a child or a child's needs, knowledge, service delivery, constraints, valuation, reciprocal power, communication, and trust" (Lake & Billingsley, 2000, p. 244). The relationship between these factors is illustrated in Figure 1.

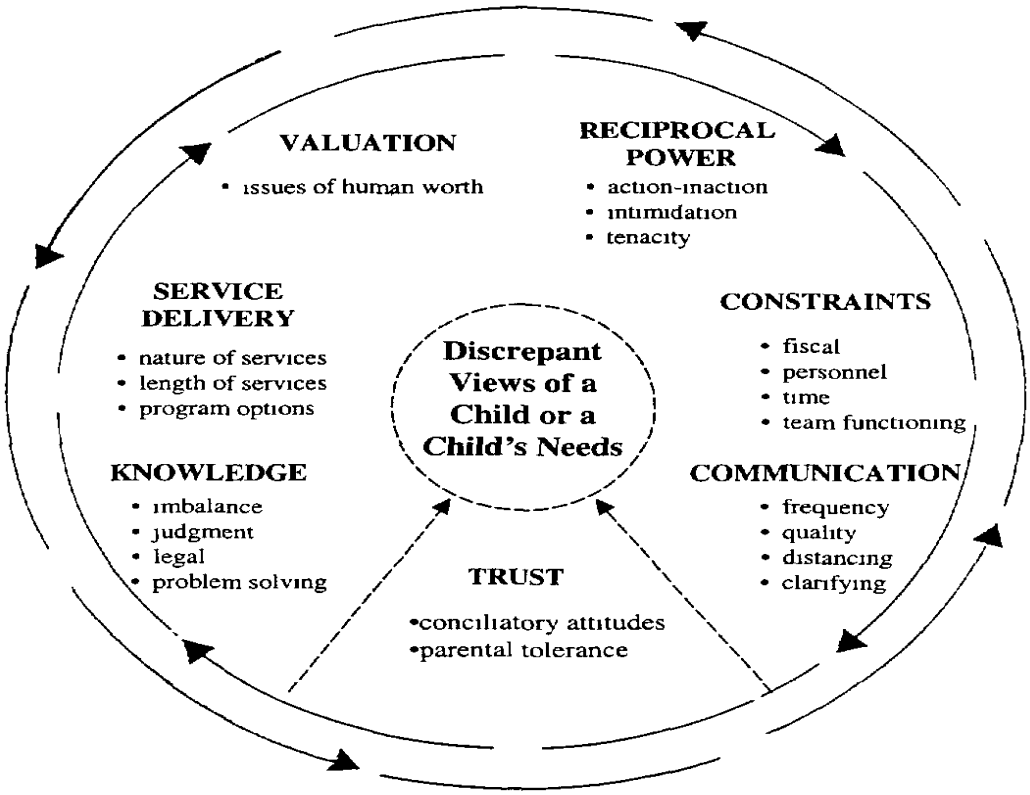


Figure 1. Schematic of 8 categories of factors that contribute to conflict. Adapted from "An Analysis of Factors That Contribute to Parent-School Conflict in Special Education," by J. Lake, and B. Billingsley, 2000, Remedial and Special Education, 21, p. 244.

This illustration highlights the prominent influence of perspective, and demonstrates how these eight elements are integrated. Conflict escalation in the area of communication was attributed to both discursive elements, such as the timing of clarification statements, lack of listening, perceptual interpretations involving information being withheld, as well as deceitful communicative efforts (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). This study identified only one issue in the category of communication that deescalated conflict; the presence of a neutral third party in a mediation session. During such sessions, both parents and school officials expressed the ability to share their feelings, discussed important issues, and revealed their needs. Therefore, one goal

for effective mediation is to create an atmosphere where parties feel safe and comfortable in sharing feelings, needs, and concerns. Discovering how discourse can be used as a tool to accomplish this goal will be valuable.

Additional components that contribute to communication problems at ARD meetings include: lack of respect for parent input, lack of preparation, language differences, inattentiveness, intimidation through jargon, procedure-focused interactions, complicated paperwork, and rushing through the meeting (Davis, 2011; Fish, 2009; Hansuvadha, 2009; Rock, 2000; Sheehey, 2006). Thus, it can be concluded that elements contributing to conflict at ARD meetings are varied and complex. Nevertheless, the majority of issues involve discourse. As a result, the need for improvement in this area cannot be overstressed.

Special Education Conflict in Texas

The data regarding conflict in special education in Texas resembles the national litigation trend in special education. Over 1,250 due process requests were filed in Texas between 2006 and 2011. Complaints, mediation requests, and due process requests made to the TEA are summarized in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Texas Dispute Resolution Efforts

School Year	Complaints Filed	Mediation Requests	Due Process Requests
2006-2007	450	238	329
2007-2008	425	301	300
2008-2009	no data reported	no data reported	no data reported
2009-2010	327	342	331
2010-2011	327	297	293
Five Year Total	1529	1178	1253
Grand Total			3690

Note: Adapted from "TEA: The number of special-ed complaints is on track to outpace last year's statistics," para. 3, 2011.

Not all special education due process filings result in a hearing. Due process hearings in Texas (as opposed to filings) have decreased, as evidenced by 73 due process hearing decisions in 2004, and only 29 in 2011 (TEA, 2012c). Of those 29 cases, eight specifically list the term "parent participation" as a keyword. (TEA, 2012c). However, parent participation is an element of almost 40% of the cases. This indicates a need to address dilemmas at ARD meetings in an effort to prevent litigation.

As previously mentioned, a person's position and purpose play a role in the perception of conflict. Survey results regarding the perceptions of Directors of Special Education across the

state of Texas indicated that 49.5% ranked parent misunderstanding as the top reason that parents filed for due process hearings (Besinaiz, 2009). The second most common reason was related to inexperienced teachers (45.1%), while inexperienced campus administrators (42.9%) were third. Although not stated specifically, elements of discourse may directly or indirectly influence the perception of a person's experience. The proposed study plans to address discursive interactions between parents and administrators, which may contribute to improvement to trend in due process hearing filings in the future.

According to the 2012 TEA statewide survey of parents of students receiving special education services for the 2011 school year, 78% of parents indicated that the school "always" communicated with them, 19% indicated school communication "sometimes" and 3% claimed that the school "never" communicated with them. The same survey also indicated that 85% of parents felt their concerns were "always" considered by the ARD Committee, 14% felt that was the case "sometimes" and only 2% felt their concerns were "never" considered. Therefore, 22% of parents indicated that the school communicated with them less than always, and 16% noted that their concerns were addressed by the ARD Committee less than always. Furthermore, it should be noted that only 20% of the 18,409 surveys disseminated statewide were returned. The local response rate for Region 2 in South Texas –where the present study was conducted- was less than 20%. Multiple conclusions can be drawn from the low response rate, and high rate of reported parental satisfaction with communication at ARD meetings. It is possible to presume that only satisfied parents returned the surveys. Another supposition could be that parents were busy, and found no benefit in returning the survey. Yet another speculative conclusion could be that dissatisfied parents were so disenfranchised with communication practices at their child's ARD meeting, they assumed their input was not valuable. As a result, the methodology used in

obtaining this data is questionable. However, when comparing the results of the 2010 Parent Survey to the TEA dispute resolution data for the same year (2009-2010), the inconsistency is evident (Besinaiz, 2009; TEA, 2012b). The fact that parents file for litigation and do not return a *satisfied* survey demonstrates an obvious dissatisfaction with special education services in public schools is evident

Texas is not immune to conflict in special education. As noted previously, the trends in Texas mirror those on the national scale. Region 2, in which this study will take place, typifies state and national trends regarding IEP/ARD negotiations. However, in region 2 due process hearings are filed more often than complaint requests and mediation requests combined. This information is shown in Table 2:

Table 2

Region 2 Dispute Resolution Efforts

School Year	Complaints Filed	Mediation Requests	Due Process Requests
2007-2008	10	40	52
2008-2009	no data reported	no data reported	no data reported
2009-2010	6	45	61
2010-2011	11	17	46
Four Year Total	27	102	159
Grand Total			288

Note: Adapted from "TEA Dispute Resolution Data by Region".

This data reinforces the indication of discord surrounding communication in special education, and demonstrates that dissatisfaction with the special education process is prominent locally.

Conflicts about special education are time consuming, stressful, arduous, and confrontational. They are damaging to school districts and parents both monetarily and in regard to relationships (Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Mueller, Singer & Draper, 2008). Therefore, it is important to address the problem of communicative conflicts in special education. The relationship between the parent and the campus administrator that evolves relative to the ARD meeting is vital. Decisions that occur in ARD meetings are greatly influenced by the

relationships of the persons involved in the student's services. Thus, the discourse between parents and campus administrators is the most appropriate feature to study. By beginning with the dialogue between these two stakeholders, solutions based on an in-depth understanding of contributions and responses to conflicts at ARD meetings can evolve.

Conflict Management and Prevention

Finding ways to manage conflict productively is an ongoing issue. It is important to review current literature regarding parent-school conflict, including recommendations and practices, so that relationships between parents and campus administrators are maintained before, during, and after conflict arises. Studies and reports that offer advice on how to either avoid or handle conflict at ARD meetings are abundant (Adams, 2011; Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Bordin & Lytle, 2000; Bradley, 2005; Cooper & Rascon, 1994; Epstein, 2011; Feinberg, Beyer & Moses, 2002; Hess, 2006; Lytle & Bordin, 2011; McNaughton & Vostal, 2010; Mueller, 2009; Newman, 2005; Rock, 2000; Vincent & Evans, 1996). Most commonly, such advice consists of "to do" lists for school staff. Examples of such suggestions include creating a welcoming atmosphere at the meeting, clarifying parents' expectations, making data-driven decisions, focusing on shared interests, having regular contact with parents before and after the meeting, minimizing the use of jargon, and considering creating a stakeholder council of persons involved in the special education process (Bradley, 2005; Fish, 2009; Lytle & Bordin, 2011; Newman, 2005; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011). It is likely that these recommendations are simple and involve actions based on directives rather than actions taken based on personal reflection. Likewise, these recommendations appear to be generic as they could be applied to any meeting involving specialized language and decision-making. Additionally, though with less frequency, some articles provide suggestions aimed specifically at parents. These include asking questions, being involved in the meeting, requesting further explanations when information is unclear, knowing

their rights, seeking win-win solutions, providing feedback, being proactive in learning about the IEP process, and sharing information (Bordin & Lytle, 2000; Fish, 2008, 2009; Lytle & Bordin, 2011). In an effort to streamline the multitudes of recommendations provided in the literature, a compilation of the data has been grouped into the categories of Partnership/Participation, Relationships, and Communication and can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Recommendations for Conflict Management/Prevention

Partnership/Participation	Relationships	Communication
Create participation opportunities during the meeting	Conduct meeting in native language of parent	Listen and communicate frequently
Poll parents for satisfaction	Describe roles of meeting participants	Implement a communication policy
Display a picture of the student during the meeting	Check for parent understanding at various points during the meeting	Speak clearly and concisely; be tactful and honest
Brainstorm problem-solving team input on butcher paper	Share resources, offer parent training	Summarize data at certain points of the meeting
Use alternate agenda based on purpose of the meeting; allow members to contribute to the agenda	Address concerns directly	Discuss goals in regard to student activities vs. turn-taking
Be flexible in scheduling the Meeting	Allow parent to sign all documents first	Answer questions
Be approachable and be on time for the meeting	Demonstrate authentic caring	Use active listening
Spend time discussing needs, concerns, successes at times other than the ARD meeting	Share needs	Be sure informal talk prior to meeting includes all persons in the room
Develop a shared vision for the student	Participate in a positive manner	Use pronouns such as “we” and “us”

(Adams, 2011; Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Cooper & Rascon, 1994; Fish, 2009; Lytle & Bordin, 2011; Rock, 2000; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011; Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010)

A study by Esquivel, Ryan, and Bonner (2008) revealed that communication, relationships, and problem solving were three of five categories parents used to describe their experiences in school-based team meetings. The study also found that, parents indicated that having conversations with a problem-solving quality were beneficial (Esquivel, Ryan & Bonner, 2008). Additionally, conversations that did not include predetermined outcomes or patronizing comments were viewed as advantageous. In reference to relationships, one parent in the study noted, "One can go a long way in a relationship with 'I think we may have to agree to disagree on that point.' or 'I would like to respectfully disagree because of my observations'" (Esquivel, Ryan & Bonner, 2008, pp. 247-248). Thus, acknowledging disagreements may be one way to improve relationships.

In the category of communication, parents reported that having their voice heard and their input valued were vital (Esquivel, Ryan & Bonner, 2008). Parents recommended that "…professionals can indicate that they value their input by voicing an interpretation of parents' ideas, asking for clarification and integrating parents' ideas into a plan of action….paraphrase, ask questions to clarify if needed and discuss parents' contributions and ideas" (Esquivel, Ryan & Bonner, 2008). These propositions may be helpful, yet seem to require intentional cooperation, and insight into parents' perspectives, in order to achieve effective, long-term change, rather than a snapshot of consensus. As a result, unless a person is naturally contemplative or an expert at gaining reciprocal understanding, such an endeavor can be difficult without the tools and content that the proposed study intends to provide.

Hammond, Ingalls & Trussell (2008) generated six specific recommendations for school staff to consider. These suggestions were:

- Communicate better during the meeting.

- Develop ways to make the family comfortable during the meeting.
- Help families deal with the stress and trauma of an initial IEP meeting.
- Prepare families for the meeting.
- Share assessment results with families before the meeting so there is adequate time for questions to be prepared.
- Convey a commitment to the child's best interest while also asserting that the student is genuinely liked by staff

Although generally beneficial, these suggestions seem to be surface-level, broad-scope proposals, as opposed to discourse-specific actions that could contribute to reflective conflict prevention and resolution.

Fisher (2009) recommended that participants engage in dialogue as one of six strategies for preventing and resolving conflicts in the area of special education. She also suggested that school professionals follow four guidelines for productive dialogue with parents. The first is to "…reflect and take full responsibility for his or her part in the entire issue, admit to not knowing the answer, and listen to diverse opinions rather than countering them" (Fisher, 2009, p. 128). Using self-reflection and minimizing predetermined responses can increase a person's awareness of motives and reactions, which can lead to both personal and systemic change. A second guideline is to approach conflict through empathy and mutual respect. Thirdly, parents and school professionals should dialogue as equals, with reciprocal valuation. Finally, in order to enable more time, effort, and understanding in working toward consensus, parties should converse more than just at the meeting. Although seemingly dialogue-based, these recommendations, like most others, seem to address peripheral layers of discourse, rather than

focusing on the precise elements that contribute to how conflict at ARD meetings is approached, handled, and resolved. As a result, such generic recommendations may not yield successful conflict resolution beyond "smile and nod" compliance.

In addition to research-based recommendations, there are legal procedures available for handling conflict. IDEIA (2004) outlines multiple methods for resolving conflict. The least intrusive is to recess and then convene another ARD meeting. Reconvened ARD meetings should take place within the next 10 school days. During the recess, both parties have the opportunity to reconsider options raised during the meeting, and gather more data to support their previous recommendations (19 Texas Administrative Code [T.A.C.] §89.1050). This option can be initiated by either the parent or the district representative.

A second option for resolving disagreements is voluntary mediation (IDEIA, 2004; 34 C.F.R. §300). Both parents and districts can request this free service from a state education agency. After the request is made, the state education agency assigns an impartial mediator who has met state-defined training requirements. It is important to note that the mediator's role is restricted solely to mediation services. S/he is forbidden to offer opinion, advice, or judgment to either party (T.A.C. §300; 34 C.F.R. § 615). Moreover, the mediator does not serve as an advocate for the parent, the school district, or the state, and is not a member of the ARD Committee. The role of the mediator is to assist the parties in reaching a mutually agreeable compromise. If an agreement is reached, both parties collaboratively record the agreed-upon terms, and sign the document, which becomes a legally binding contract that is enforceable in a state court or a federal district court (TEA, 2012b, p.8). Either party may be accompanied at the mediation by legal representation.

A third option is to file a complaint with the state education agency (IDEIA, 2004). When a complaint is filed, the state education agency is obligated to respond with a written decision within 60 calendar days of the date the complaint was filed TEA, 2012a, p.15). In Texas, complaints may be resolved through voluntary local resolution, mediation, internal investigation conducted by the school district, or investigation conducted by the Texas Education Agency. A state-level investigation typically requires that both parties provide TEA all requested and related documents, and participate in phone conferences. This is followed by TEA's final determination.

Upon receipt of a complaint, a school district in Texas is mandated to provide a resolution session. School staff and parents meet voluntarily without legal representation to discuss and resolve the issue (34 C.F.R. § 300.510). If a parent chooses not to attend the resolution meeting, the district can request to have the complaint dismissed (IDEIA, 2004). Should the resolution process take place but prove unsuccessful, there is still another venue to pursue a solution.

The fourth dispute resolution option offered through IDEIA is to file for a due process hearing (34 C.F.R. §300.532). According to the Texas Education Agency,

> A special education due process hearing is a formal, adversarial legal process similar to going to trial in a court. A due process hearing may be requested when a disagreement arises regarding the identification, evaluation, educational placement or services of a student with a disability, and/or regarding the provision of FAPE [Free Appropriate Public Education] to a student with a disability (TEA, 2012b, p.15).

The timeline for filing for a due process hearing is within one calendar year of when the filing party knew or should have known about the perceived transgression (TEA, 2012b, p.19).

Although attorneys typically represent the parties, legal representation is not required in due process hearings. Unless otherwise agreed upon by both parties, the due process hearing timeline includes a "30-day resolution period followed by a 45-day hearing period" (TEA, 2012b, p. 20). As in courtroom proceedings, a state-appointed Hearing Officer hears the case, and the filing party bears the burden of proof of any wrongdoing (TEA, 2012a).

Potential outcomes of due process hearings include reimbursement for private services and tuition, awards of compensatory education, awards of relief pertaining to disciplinary sanctions, reimbursement for private services and tuition, orders for a school district to implement an educational program, orders to conduct an evaluation, or orders to change an educational placement (TEA, 2012b, p. 30). Following the decision rendered by the Hearing Officer, either party can file an appeal to a state or federal court within 90 days if they disagree with the decision (TEA, 2012b, p. 31). These resolution alternatives provide numerous and varied opportunities for parents and school districts to reach consensus. However, a non-mandated option has recently gained popularity.

Facilitated IEP (FIEP) meetings are a relatively new dispute resolution alternative (CADRE, n.d.; Feinberg, Beyer & Moses, 2002. FIEP was first implemented in Texas in 2008. The procedure is similar to the mediation process, but the facilitator is not assigned by the state education agency. As a result, the facilitator is not perceived as a representative of the school or state therefore is considered a neutral party. FIEP training has been provided through regional Educational Service Centers (ESC) both at these centers and on-site at school districts (Center for Accord, 2011). Similar to a mediator, a facilitator serves as a neutral party representing no specific entity. Predicted benefits of this training include adding structure to ARD meetings,

improving relationships between families and schools, supporting effective collaboration between both parties, and reducing emotional stress.

A unique characteristic of FIEP meetings is that any person trained as an Advanced Facilitator, such as a teacher, administrator, or parent, can be called upon to serve at an ARD meeting (Center for Accord, 2011). This reduces the cost of independent contractors and allows for the role of facilitator to be met by anyone who is willing to be trained and serve in that role. A recent example in Region 2 of Texas involved recurrent tumultuous ARD meetings with one family that consistently resulted in an impasse. As a result, a facilitator was requested through the region's ESC. It was the district's responsibility to explain the FIEP process to the family, and to put them in contact with the facilitator regarding any questions they had. The family was given the choice of whether or not to proceed through the FIEP process. They agreed to do so. A teacher from a local district attended the ARD meeting as the facilitator. Her efforts focused on turn taking, restating information shared between the parties, asking for clarification and asking each party to confirm their understanding, and as a result the meeting ended in consensus. In this situation, the facilitator happened to be a classroom teacher.

The coordination of staff, time and travel between districts can be cumbersome in enacting this option. However, the success of the service, defined as a collaborative, non-litigious outcome, is significant (Accord, 2012). The implementation of FIEP has been rigorous in certain regions of Texas, and TEA has funded the training for both school district staff and parents over the past four years. However, in 2013 Texas Senate Bill 542 required TEA to provide information to parents about IEP facilitation as an alternative dispute resolution option (Senate Bill 542, 2013).

Common to the majority of recommendations and procedures for conflict prevention and resolution, is the role of conversation. At ARD meetings, discussions and decisions are handled through dialogue. Parents and campus administrators are key members of ARD Committees. Therefore, it is possible to deduce a conglomeration of nebulous exchanges into a detailed analysis that will inductively pinpoint strategies, actions, and reactions that contribute to conquering conflict.

Discourse Analysis

Within the last 50 years, although rooted in linguistics, discourse analysis has developed into an interdisciplinary field, and has "…acquired the status, stability, significance and integrity of a well-established discipline extending the conventional boundaries of linguistics" (Bhatia, Flowerdew, & Jones, 2008, p. 1). In other words, discourse analysis includes a variety of approaches, procedures, and methodologies. It is useful in many disciplines beyond those based in language or communication. Approaches to discourse analysis may focus on different types of data, and pursue diverse understandings. They include conversational analysis, narrative analysis, argumentation analysis, discursive psychology, and interactional linguistics (Bhatia, Flowerdew & Jones, 2008). To take the study of discourse beyond the confines of linguistics establishes bridges between, and blends disciplines, which can launch new areas of study (Craig, 1989).

Discourse analysis can be defined as the examination of language as it is used. "Language is a key way that we humans make and break our world, our institutions, and our relationships…discourse analysis can illuminate problems and controversies in the world" (Gee, 2011, p. 10). As the means through which we make sense of our world, understanding discourse and its functions can lead to changes in how we process information, as well as the content of our understanding. As a result, problems and controversies that were incomprehensible within

the framework of our previous understanding, can be discovered, labeled, and addressed. Discourse analysis has also been described as

> …the analysis of linguistic behavior, written and spoken, beyond the limits of individual sentences, focusing primarily on the meaning constructed and interpreted as language is used in particular social contexts. This definition really contains two main ingredients: the idea that language can be analyzed not just on the level of the phoneme/morpheme, the word, the clause or the sentence, but also on the level of the text, and the idea that language ought to be analyzed not as an abstract set of rules, but as a tool for social action (Bhatia, Flowerdew & Jones, 2008).

Otherwise stated, the purpose of analysis will drive the type of analysis employed. Discourse analysis "…involves the study of particular segments of talk or text where excerpts are used to make scholarly arguments" (Tracy, 2005, p. 302). Acknowledging that discourse is a means to an end, one must understand both the concrete grammatical elements, and the use of those elements in achieving specific communicative goals (Gee, 1999). Thus, the transcription of the selected portions of discourse becomes part of the analysis. The analysis of the discourse is a tool based on the communication details that the researcher determines relevant in light of the study's pursued theory.

Although some may perceive discourse as 'just words,' such words, phrases, and their meanings make up language; the crucial tool of communication. Language is how we obtain, share, pursue , understand, and make sense of the world around us (Gee, 2011). Generally, discourse can be described as language-based exchanges between people in a socially-centered context and as such, "Discourse creates a common sense of the world ….the effects of discourse are all around us…human experience is therefore shaped by discourse" (Nachtreib, 2011, p. 11).

Experiences are understood and given meaning through language. A more traditional definition is offered by Hall (1997), "… it defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about... nothing has any meaning outside of discourse" (p. 44). In this sense, the exchange of information in the context of a situation creates the structure in which topical information can be discussed, considered, and defined. Often, discourse is assumed because the absence of direction in conversations can result in random information sharing. Small talk, off-topic and side bar conversations are examples of information that may be shared whether relative or not. While such exchanges of information may be coincidentally informative, they are more likely to yield unstructured, haphazard meaning for those involved.

Within the constant and changing interactions of such dialogic spaces, parents and professionals can construct new and transformative meanings. Discourse serves as scaffolding so that communicative exchanges develop into an active, focused, progressive discussion about the topic. It is assumed that nobody speaks without regard for information that is shared with them and around them and it is through those exchanges that the meaning of discourse is created. Therefore new meanings based on the analysis of those dialogic exchanges can transform both the discourse itself, and its outcome.

Current dialogues about discourse strive to provide more in-depth explanations. Gee (2011) uses the terms "big D" and "little d" (p. 26) to explain discourse. Big D (Discourse) represents all language-based, contextual elements of a social event and has been further defined by other scholars as "…ways of believing, representing, acting, performing and valuing that comprise what it means to be a 'competent' user of language…" (Rogers, 2002, p. 222) in a

specific context. Little d (discourse) represents the literal language (words) that are used within events, conversations and stories (Gee, 2011). Gee likens discourse to a dance:

> A Discourse is a "dance" that exists in the abstract as a coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects, times and places and in the here and now as a performance that is recognizable…a performance that is never exactly the same. It all comes down, often, to what the "masters of the dance" (the people who inhabit the Discourse) will allow to be recognized or will be forced to recognize as a possible instantiation of the dance. (2011, p. 36)

The dance analogy describes the uniqueness of each exchange, and how those involved in it contribute to both the process, and the outcome. To extend this analogy, one could find parallels between the music of a dance, and the structure of a practice, between the dancers and the participants in the discourse, as well as between the steps of the dance, both scripted and improvisational, and the progress of a communication exchanges. Last but not least, it may be beneficial to understand how missteps made during a dance, whether intentional or not, can be analogous to the conflict within a practice.

The rules governing discourse are contextual. It can also be understood as the use of language among those who share common beliefs, understandings, and ideas within a certain social practice. Paltridge (2006) defines discourse as "…typical ways of using language in particular situations… these *discourses* [original emphasis] not only share particular meanings they also have characteristic linguistic features associated with them" (2006, p. 2). This definition can be demonstrated by communication exchanges in a courtroom setting. Such exchanges will include not only legalistic jargon, but also language-based elements that are specific to that setting such as the phrases, "May it please the court?" "May I approach the

bench?" or "Yes, Your Honor." These are linguistic components that one would not expect to hear in a setting other than a courtroom.

The Discourse of ARD Meetings

As mentioned earlier, communication between parents and education professionals is foundational for developing educational programs that benefit students (Rock, 2000). In ARD meetings discourse is the primary vehicle for sharing information, building relationships, and making decisions. Fennimore claims, "Educators never 'just talk.' The language environment of any school or educational institution serves as a dynamic platform for powerful attitudes and behaviors" (p. 4). Hence, the importance of discourse in shaping the experiences of participants at ARD meetings is critical.

While an ARD meeting may be considered a linear event with a beginning and end, the dialogue of the meeting is embedded in, and influenced by personal views, relationships, knowledge, attitudes, and expectations; all of which sculpt the meeting outcomes. Additionally, The flow of the meeting tends to be dictated by fidelity to procedure, to the extent that it may be perceived as an "assembly line" (Hess, 2006, p. 156) process.

ARD meetings have been described as a "discourse arena" (Valle & Aponte, 2002, p. 471). They are typically encased in educational vernacular. Although not required by law, many public school districts utilize a written agenda to ensure that all necessary items are addressed during an ARD meeting. This provides a predictable structure for the meeting, and can assist members in staying on track. Ruppar and Gaffney (2011) recommend an agenda that focuses on topics that need to be covered, highlights points of agreement, and allows all ARD Committee members to contribute to its creation. The use of an agenda can also help make ARD Committee members aware of what to expect, reduce off-topic discussions, minimize side-bar conversations, and assure everyone the opportunity to provide input; all of which can contribute to consensus

building. Conversely, if an agenda is used to dictate discussion, the input of the ARD Committee members can be limited, and conversations may seem forced. Therefore, items not specifically listed on an agenda can be discussed at an ARD meeting. An example of an agenda can be found in Appendix A.

The purpose of an ARD meeting will steer the course of the conversation and decision-making. For example, at an annual ARD meeting for students aged 14 or older, the consideration of post-graduation goals is initiated through transition projections and graduation plans (34 C.F.R. §300). At an ARD meeting held to address the potential disciplinary placement in an alternative educational setting, focal points of discussion may revolve around disciplinary history, additional assessments, and behavioral interventions. The general course of dialogue at ARD meetings includes conversations, data sharing, requests, responses, discussions, and decision-making. The sequence of events may vary, and a cycle may be repeated concerning various topics that arise.

Each cycle includes decision points. However, while each decision point presents an opportunity for consensus, it also presents equal opportunity for dissention. Because of numerous decision points and the diversity of possible outcomes, the complexity of decision-making, combined with the tension and emotions related to students with disabilities, ARD meetings can be fertile ground for communicative disagreements, dilemmas and misunderstandings. For example, while all participants at an ARD meeting may agree upon the overall goals for the student with disabilities, differences of opinion can easily arise (Lake & Billingsley, 2000).

Studies of Conflict in Special Education Using Discourse Analysis

Numerous studies involving special education and discourse analysis were found in the literature (Bakhtin, 1981; Harry, 1992; Lewis & Forman, 2007; Mehan, 1981; Rogers, 2002;

Rumberger, 1995; Salembier & Furney, 1997; Valle & Aponte, 2002). Two studies were found that explicitly addressed discourse within special education. However, no studies were found specifically using discourse analysis to analyze conflict between parents and campus administrators during ARD meetings. Ruppar and Gaffney (2011) advocate for additional research in language and communication styles used during ARD meetings, noting their contribution to interpersonal interactions. As a result, the purpose of their qualitative study was to understand how discourse in special education meetings affects both the decisions made, and the participants' perceptions of the decision-making process. Their findings are categorized into three themes:

- Differing but silent opinions: Although some participants' opinions clashed with decisions made during the meeting, these opinions were not shared.
- Informational communications: Communication between members prior to the meeting affected decisions made during the meeting. Conversely, topics that arose during the meeting that had not been discussed prior to the meeting resulted in uncomfortable situations.
- IEP document and power: The IEP document was used as a dominating guide for the flow of the meeting, and conversations. This resulted in limited opportunities to discuss other information.

The function of discourse is apparent regarding the structure of meetings, and consultation prior to meetings.

The second study found to explicitly address discourse within special education was conducted by Harris (2010). It examined the effects of special education teachers' discourse on participation styles of nine parents, while attending special education meetings in different

settings (rural, suburban, and urban). The study used a mixed methods approach that included micro-ethnography, transcript analysis of both videotaped meetings and interviews with parent participants. Harris determined that all parents involved in the study were passive participants. Their involvement was hindered by the conversations of special education teachers.

While the two studies described (Harris, 2010; Ruppar and Gaffney (2011) are similar to the study proposed here, neither focused solely on discourse surrounding conflict between campus administrators and parents at ARD meetings. Ruppar and Gaffney (2011) intended to identify the effect discourse had on decision making. Meanwhile, Harris (2010) analyzed data through a quantitative lens looking at discourse during the entire meeting, such as word counts, the number of turns taken, the types of turns taken, the number of words spoken per minute, and the length of the meeting. The studies of Harris (2010) and Ruppar and Gaffney (2011) studies analyzed every communicative exchange that occurred during the selected meetings. The study being proposed will use only theoretically-based, selected portions of data for analysis. The proposed study also differs from these two studies in the intended outcome. Neither of these studies sought to generate practical theories or strategies for participants to utilize in the future. As a result, the study being proposed is unique. It will address an area of need in ways that have not yet been attempted.

Communicative conflicts, discursive actions, and the perceptions of parents and school administrators in special education have received little attention in the research literature. Lake and Billingsley (2000) explain, "…much as been written about parent-school partnerships and collaboration, but professionally little is written about how to maintain collaboration in the face of adversity" (2000, p. 249). Eleven years later, Ruppar and Gaffney (2011) echoed this observation by stating, "No recent studies of interpersonal communication at IEP meetings were

found" (p. 12). As a result, it can be determined that there is a place for a study that focuses on skills and strategies for use during adversity in interpersonal communication at ARD meetings. The proposed study singles out communication exchanges specific to conflict at ARD meetings, and explicitly analyzes discourse between parents and school administrators. Because dilemmas in special education cannot be expected to disappear, both parents and school officials need good communication, problem-solving, and negotiation skills. As parties involved in conflict gain these skills, conflicts may appear less threatening" (Lake & Billingsley, 2000, p. 249). Facing conflict armed with tools for resolution can diminish the "win or lose" mentality, and increase opportunities for compromise and collaboration. However, to gain communication skills for conflict resolution can be difficult in the midst of a conflict. Lake and Billingsley (2000) reiterate that "…it is critical to learn ways to diminish the negative aspects of inevitable conflict and to create constructive solutions *before* [emphasis added] conflict creates damage" (p. 241). It may seem backwards to create solutions first; they are the result of learned skills and self-reflection after a conflict. However these learned skills can be applied the next time conflict arises. Using these learned skills preemptively can potentially prevent or minimize damage to relationships. While not what many would consider the standard definition, Kalyanpur and Harry (1999) suggest a need for a culture of reciprocity, "…a method of inquiry for professionals to reflect on their practices and question the assumptions of their field" (p. 115) in order to reiterate the importance of reflexivity. Although discussed in reference to cultural differences, Kalyanpur & Harry (1997)recommend that parents and professionals engage in candid discussions about differences in values, and mutually respect what emerges from these discussions. Such an approach requires "…constant awareness of self and others…" (Kalyanpur, Harry & Skrtic, 2000, p. 132). This approach is reflected in the methodology of Grounded

Practical Theory. This study intends to incorporate the concepts of reciprocity and practical action.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed regulations regarding special education services in public schools. I specifically addressed the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). Discourse and discourse analysis were defined, reviewed, and discussed with a focus on their influence regarding ARD meetings in public schools. It was observed that conflict in special education is pervasive, and can be attributed to numerous elements, such as legal expectations, deficient communication skills, and general disagreement. Additionally, litigation in special education can be harmful to both parents and schools. It can be viewed as a high-cost, both in terms of fiscal expenditure, as well as damage to relationships. It is also highly detrimental to the decision-making processes that affect students with disabilities. Despite these adverse effects, dilemmas in special education are widespread both nationally and locally. Few previous studies have specifically addressed the discursive elements of conflict between parents and public school administrators at ARD meetings. This study will address conflicts that occur between parents and campus administrators at ARD meetings. It will explicitly use discourse analysis for the purpose of yielding actionable strategies for participants to use in working toward consensus in future ARD meeting.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this discourse analysis study was to develop an in-depth understanding of how dilemmas are negotiated between parents of children receiving special education services and campus administrators at Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings in a South Texas public school district.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities describe their respective dilemmas during their participation in ARD meetings?
2. What interactional strategies are utilized by campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities when handling dilemmas at ARD meetings?
3. What expectations do campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities have about their roles in ARD meetings?

Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative research can be described as "opportunistic" a veritable "feast" (Peshkin, 1993, p. 23) of possible outcomes for those of us whose appetite can be satiated only by in-depth understanding of multiple perspectives. In other words, qualitative inquiry can yield many findings that result in profound understanding of the subject of inquiry. A qualitative study is one wherein the researcher "attempts to systematically inquire about an in-depth nature of the human experience within the context in which the experience occurs" (Bhattacharya, 2007, p. 3). Qualitative methods are useful in exploring questions related to perceptions and beliefs about experiences through which a phenomenon becomes better understood (Denzin, Lincoln, & Giardina, 2006). The concept of systematic inquiry is rather straightforward. However, when applied to unique and context-rich social experiences, numerous interpretations, potentially

contradictory meanings and themes can be revealed. Thus what seems a "straight forward" route of examination can quickly become a path of twists, turns, crevices, and sometimes, dead ends.

Through what Patton (2002) refers to as "naturalistic inquiry" (p. 41), qualitative researchers explore situations as they innately occur. In an effort to understand and explain both human and social reality, qualitative inquiry involves gaining the perspective of each person involved in the activity and respecting it as their reality (Creswell, 2007) within their social contexts. Qualitative research provides the opportunity to gain vivid descriptions and insightful interpretations of participant experiences and give emphasis to the significance of those experiences. Marshall and Rossman (2006) explain that, "Qualitative research is a broad approach to the study of social phenomenon" (p. 2). To state it differently, studying a social phenomenon as a total experience versus single segments that make up that experience is best done through qualitative inquiry. In this study an ARD meeting served as the social phenomenon.

These meetings are context-rich and involve multiple participants as well as multiple, sometimes competing, perspectives. According to Brantlinger et al. (2005), qualitative research "can explore the nature and extent to which a practice has constructive impact on individuals with disabilities, their families, or on settings in which they tend to work, reside or be educated" (p. 196). The exploration of participants' experiences can assist in revealing the influence of the special education process and procedures such as ARD meetings, which was at the center of this study. The discourse used by parents and campus administrators in addressing dilemmas during an ARD meeting and interviews with each participant were the primary sources of data for analysis. Within the context of these meetings, discourse analysis was used to identify problems, illuminate conversational tactics used to address conflict, and craft strategies for improving how

conflict is handled. In an effort to gain an in-depth understanding of how discursive components between the parents and administrators influence conflict, qualitative inquiry is the most appropriate approach for this study.

Although the ARD meeting is only one element of the special education process, it is the central and most collaborative activity between the parents and the administrators. This meeting involves several people coming together in an effort to reach consensus about services for a student with disabilities. By studying the complexity of these social interactions in the natural setting of ARD meetings and noting the meanings that participants assign to such interactions, I resonate with the notion that, "qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 2). Thus, in qualitative research, through a shared conversation and reflection on one's experiences, the researcher and the researched co-construct interpretive meanings of those experiences.

Subjectivity Statement

Subjectivities can be likened to a person's mood by influencing judgment and coloring perspective. Whether performing the role of researcher, sibling, parent or peer, a person's subjectivities are "insistently present in both the research and non-research aspects of our life" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). An analogy might compare one's subjectivities to the undertow of a wave on a beach: omnipresent but with variation in strength and direction. Subjectivities cannot, and in qualitative research should not, be eliminated (Peshkin, 1988). However, they can be "tamed" through self-awareness resulting from consistent, systematic self-monitoring (Peshkin, 1993). Such mindfulness allows the researcher to "consciously attend to the orientations" (Peshkin, 1993, p. 21) that shape what is seen and its meaning so as not to "exorcise" one's subjectivities, but to exercise one's subjectivities. Otherwise explained, the balance between the

awareness of subjectivities and actions based on subjectivities can only be accomplished through acknowledgement, responsiveness, and intention.

My subjectivities are grounded in two personal beliefs; (a) anyone that works with students with disabilities has unending compassion and (b) such a person has the intention to serve the needs of the student more so than his/her own. Understanding these are my personal beliefs, I exercised conscious efforts to not be critical of those who do not rise to these expectations. There are many lenses of perception that affect how I understand my topic. These include the lenses of teacher, campus administrator, district administrator, and speech pathologist. Although not a parent myself, I am inclined to make judgments about meetings, interactions, activities related to special education from a parent's perspective. I also tend to assume the perspective of a frustrated, judgmental and demanding parent, and make determinations from that mind-set. While I personally view this as a form of empathy, it may be considered a survival skill related to my job duties as I expect and prepare for the worst and then if it does not occur, I am no worse off but much more prepared. In acknowledging these subjectivities, ongoing efforts will be made to account for them. My subjectivities were addressed through the rigor of the study with intense self-monitoring and efforts dedicated to being attentive, yet not judgmental, so that I was able to approach the study as a researcher more so than a practitioner.

My investment in this topic is two-fold: professional responsibilities and personal belief in the power of communication. Although I was not a member of the educational community in which my study took place, I consider myself to be a component of the culture of special education. As a result, I have insider knowledge and therefore I am confident in the data that were collected and my understanding of the content. Regarding my professional responsibilities,

an expectation of my duty as a Director of Special Education was once explained to me as, "… keep us out of court." Thus, I prioritize the prevention of litigation as a part of my professional duty. However, meeting the needs of students with disabilities is my primary role, which requires collaboration, leadership, and communication. Collaboration between parents and schools is vital, but equally important is consensus between district service providers who attend ARD meetings. I consider leadership and communication mutually dependent and as a result, I am invested in being able to lead by example by learning strategies related to handling conflict in various settings.

Due to my investment, I try to use communication that is effective, clear, and reciprocally beneficial. Accordingly, I tend to champion miscommunication with efforts of justification, clarification or sometimes complete restatement of what I understand the message to be. In other words, if I can assist in rephrasing communicated ideas so that everyone is "on the same page," I gain a personal sense of fulfillment. My personal experiences regarding how communication can unknowingly escalate or de-escalate conflict, advance or deter progress and either improve or damage relationships reinforce my belief that the various elements of both verbal and non-verbal communication can impact the message more than the content of the message itself. As a result, I perceive communication as a tool and expect this study to provide insight regarding how this tool is utilized regarding conflict between parents and campus administrators at ARD meetings.

Methodological Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Grounded Practical Theory (GPT), a metatheoretical approach toward the study of communication as a practical discipline as opposed to a scientific discipline (Craig, 1989). The term *metatheoretical* can best be explained as an approach that utilizes theory to explain and develop other theory. Although GPT is considered a comparatively new approach based on its introduction by Robert Craig and Karen Tracy in 1995,

the term “new” is not intended to infer that GPT is devoid of other contributions. As GPT was not born out of isolated contemplation, it leans on the other philosophical influences that include Dewey, Schön, Habermas, and Gadamer (Craig & Tracy, 2011).

John Dewey’s emphasis on learning through experience has influenced reflective practitioners across the fields of both philosophy and education (Hedeen, (2005). Dewey’s influence is foundational to GPT through elements such as purposeful reflection and applicability of information (Craig, 1989). Otherwise explained, evidence of pragmatism in GPT includes practices that are reconstructed based on participant’s input, ideals and reflection, and such information is applied to the creation of new strategies and theory. Hedeen (2005) shares the two principles of Dewey’s “theory of experience: continuity and experience” (p. 191) and reiterates Dewey’s belief that people can learn from experience, but only when they “…undertake the task of connecting experiences to consequences or to related information or ideas” (Hedeen, 2005, p. 191). Given that one of the goals of GPT is to improve the practice by connecting participants’ experiences to new information, a dimension of practicality in learning is already apparent and informed through Dewey’s philosophies.

Extending Dewey’s concept of continuity and experience, GPT leans heavily on reflection. The concept of “reflection in action” (Craig & Tracy, 2011, slide 3) requires that both parties use reflection to identify the problem and work together towards a solution. Grounded Practical Theory is also influenced by Schön, whose body of work is built upon Dewey’s theory of inquiry (Craig & Tracy, 2011; Hedeen, 2005). Schön’s concept of reflection in action has been interpreted to mean that reflective practice can result in a more collaborative method of problem solving (Kalyanpur, Harry & Skrtic, 2000). Likewise, reflective practice can create an environment for interactive discourse that recognizes, respects, and responds to the contributions

of all parties involved so new meanings can be considered (Kalyanpur, Harry & Skrtic, 2000). Thus, this process of taking action based on reflection through practice, a key tenet of GPT, demonstrates another interdisciplinary connection of this theory with Schön's philosophy.

Reflection in GPT is grounded in critical thought which connects to Habermas' contribution to GPT. Craig and Tracy (2011) connect Habermas to GPT through his "critique as discursive reflection" (Craig & Tracy, 2011, slide 3). Swindal (1999) explains Habermas' view that "…reflective processes serve a true emancipative function when they analyze, not the mental concepts, but the discursive use of language that coordinates action" (p. 19). Through reflection a person can be liberated from the concept that their perception is indeed fact, and acknowledge that their perception is actually an interpretation of events. According to Goodson (2011), "Reflection is a technical term in German philosophy: it means the process of becoming conscious of something that previously one did or thought unconsciously" (para. 27). Reflecting on what occurred (consciously and unconsciously) through discourse during a specific practice is how Habermas' philosophy is integrated in the practice of GPT.

Gadamer's contribution to GPT is through "understanding as application" (Craig & Tracy, 2011, slide 3). Referred to as both practical understanding and applicative understanding, "Practical knowledge, which seeks the human good, is not known in advance but emerges within the concrete, individual, conditioned experience of understanding" (Chin, 2004, p. 89). Thus, the scholars mentioned above resonate with the idea that practical knowledge can only be gained through experience. Kerdman (1998) reiterates this perspective by explaining Gadamer's term "*know how*: understanding through the experience of being involved with and concerned for people and events" (p. 249). Thus, understanding is gained not only through reflection, but also through interaction with others based on personal investments in both the practice itself and

relationships with those involved in the practice. An essay written by Gadamer titled, *Practical Knowledge* was dedicated to the view that application is crucial to understanding. "To understand is…to be able to apply a certain meaning to my situation. To understand is thus to apply" (p. 39) is Grondin's (2002) expanded explanation of *understanding*. Otherwise stated, with understanding comes the obligation to apply what is learned, or there is nothing gained by understanding. The application of this way of thinking can be noted in GPT both in its title and iterative cycle of learning (understanding) that leads to action, which leads to improvements in practice, which in the current study, is expected to result in improvements in cooperative conflict management.

Grounded Practical Theory combines elements of Grounded Theory and Practical Theory in developing concepts about communication practices that promote improvement within the practice being studied (Craig & Tracy, 2006). Grounded theory and GPT are both inductive processes that intend to develop a theory from the "ground up" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 9) beginning with detailed observations of real-word actions or places (Tracy, 2010). A fundamental difference between these two approaches is that grounded theory intends to develop explanatory theory based on observations and generalizations, while the goal of GPT is to develop practical theory that is "…situation-specific yet practice-general ideals designed to aid reflection. It is the interest in what is pragmatically useful - reasonable, effective, morally defensible - that distinguishes GPT from grounded theory in the first place" (Tracy, 2010, p. 218). To craft theoretical interpretations of experiences through meanings gained from the themes and stories that emerge is an aim of grounded theory. GPT, on the other hand, gives primary focus to discourse in order "to provide reasoned normative models – rational reconstructions – to inform praxis and critique…" (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 205). Thus, instead

of a constant comparison of data as done through grounded theory, GPT takes the perspectives, actions, language and conversations shared between people within a communication event and compares that data to the participant-determined situated ideals. Consequently, although both theoretical frameworks utilize comparison, a unique feature of GPT is the intention to provide a theory of how to take action to improve the practice itself.

The influence of practical theory is also found in GPT, as the name obviously implies. Providing a practical component to research, GPT seeks to deliver functional guidance to improve every-day practices based on data gathered in the study of that practice. An explanation provided by Cronen (1995) is that practical theories

> …are developed in order to make life better. They provide ways of joining in social action so as to promote (a) socially useful description, explanation, critique, and changes in situated human action; and (b) emergence of new abilities for all parties involved. (p. 231)

In other words, practical theories are only as relevant as their usefulness in improving life through action. Goldkuhl (2006) explains practical theory as an example of "functional pragmatism: knowledge *for* [emphasis added] action, versus referential pragmatism: knowledge *about* [emphasis added] action" (p. 1). Practical theory presumes an intention to use knowledge as a basis for *taking* action versus simply the possession of knowledge *about* action. Through GPT, theories revolve around communication and action. That these theories are based on the study of actual practices and critical reflection is what distinguishes GPT from practical theory (Tracy, 2008). Yet, practical theory and GPT are inextricably connected.

Another characteristic of GPT is the intention to develop better ways to participate in communicative events and improve how those events are structured. Tracy (2010) lists three questions that can be answered by GPT:

1. What are the problems, challenges and dilemmas that confront different categories of actors as they participate in a focal practice?

2. How are peoples' problems made visible in and managed through the talk that constitutes a practice?

3. What are the beliefs about good conduct -situated ideals- that various participants hold? (p. 217).

Through GPT an event is studied with focus on conflicts that arise within that event. Next, both the conflicts and participants' discursive strategies used to handle those conflicts are identified. Then, based on what participants define as ideal situations, theories are developed to determine how those conflicts can be better addressed so as to align the participants' actions and ideals, resulting in a more successful practice. Tracy (2008) describes GPT as a "phronetic approach to inquiry melding the goal of reconstructing a rich understanding of how a practice operates (interpretive) with the goal of aiding a practice's participant in reflecting about how they might act more wisely (critical)" (p. 150). So the understanding of how a practice operates is foundational for improving that practice. Such improvement is most effective when it is accomplished through participant action as the result of self-reflection.

Explained in terms of a cycle, there must first be an understanding of the practice and how it operates. Then, participants' interactions within that practice are exposed to the participants and further analyzed to generate opportunities for self-reflection. Self-reflection involves contemplating one's previous decisions and actions while considering how different choices may have yielded different results. Much like the adage, "Hindsight is 20/20," such an activity can be advantageous when considering options for future action. Next, as a result of self-reflection, participants take action to improve the practice. This can produce a better understanding of the

practice. Tracy (2010) expounds that GPT "…formulates ideas about the practice of talking that seek to be useful for participants as they reflect on how to act and evaluate others' actions" (p. 127), thus an overarching benefit of this cycle of analysis is that participants gain discursive skills and strategies that, when put into action, serve them in reaching their self-determined ideals within that practice.

Grounded Practical Theory is not without critique. An element of tension associated with GPT is the fact that it is difficult to find "validation criteria" for normative theories based on description and analysis (Craig & Tracy, 2011, slide 7). Krippendorff's (1995) critique of GPT echoes this concern through his claim, "…there is no logically determinate way to verify or falsify normative claims….the evaluation of a normative theory is done through practical judgment" (p. 258). Thus, claims made based on the notion of normalcy are subjective, and there are limited objective standards by which to judge their legitimacy.

Bridging the gap between theory and application is another challenge of GPT (Craig & Tracy, 2011). Unlike normative theories that seek to establish a standard by which to measure similar practices, Craig and Tracy (2006) explain that the goal of GPT is to advance normative theories that promote the improvement of the focal practice and consequently the subject of the theory. Explained differently, "GPT is a method for constructing normative theories" (Craig, personal communication, March 29, 2012). Outcomes generated by GPT are not expected to dictate what should be done with a practice. In an effort to connect practice and theory, Craig & Tracy (1995) share that these results are intended to "…inform practical reflection and stimulate further discussion among practitioners and academics alike" (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 269). In contrast to traditional theories that may provide theoretical claims made by researchers, GPT brings the realm of research into the territory of the practitioner through applicable concepts.

Krippendorf (1995) explains, “Grounded practical theory is not an elitist project; it seeks conversation with, not intellectual imperium over, its subjects” (p. 263). Facing the challenge of bringing practical theory to a most basic and applicable level makes GPT a unique and worthwhile undertaking. Thus, it will be the conquering of this challenge that affirms GPT as a participant-focused, action-producing approach to improving every day practices through the most common tool of trade: discourse.

The broad process of GPT begins with specifying a practice to be studied. For this study, the practice was ARD meetings held in the public school setting. The next step of GPT is to gather experiential data, including contextual information, and discourse samples. Empirical data for this study included field notes, expanded field notes, analytical memos, videotaped ARD meetings, verbatim transcription of participant interviews, and videotaped ARD meetings. The last phase of GPT involves the theoretical reconstruction of the practice through data analysis (Craig & Tracy, 2011).

Reconstruction of a practice occurs on three levels; the problem level, the technical level and the philosophical level (Craig & Tracy, 1995). At the first level, the problem level, conflicts are reconstructed as a problem or a network of problems that participants experience within the communicative event (Craig & Tracy, 1995). These problems can be literal conflicts or perceived conflicts. In an ARD meeting, for example, a parent can be offended if the campus administrator runs the meeting in an automated way. The ARD meeting may be the fifth one the administrator has held that day which may lead him/her to proceed through the meeting as if on “auto pilot.” Conversely, the parent may perceive the ARD as a very important meeting and an infrequent opportunity to learn more about how to help his/her child, therefore, the parents expect the undivided attention of the campus administrator. Teasing out the difference between

these perspectives allowed me to help participants understand what messages their actions conveyed with the intention of increasing the reciprocal understanding of their intentions.

At the technical level, a practice is reconstructed based on the researcher's descriptions of specific approaches, strategies and techniques used by participants to manage the problems noted in the first level (Craig & Tracy, 1995). Using the previous example, the researcher might take the issue of automaticity and reconstruct what communication actions initiated the concern and what strategies were used by both the parent and the campus administrator to address that problem. Again, having different perceptions of an issue, responses may vary. In this example, one scenario might be where once the campus administrator realizes there is an issue, make efforts to apologize, and offer to revisit portions of the meeting that may have been glossed over. The parent's response may be to either accept the apology allowing the meeting to move forward as planned or to ignore the apology and push through the meeting as quickly as possible. Due to the variability in potential responses and outcomes, this second level of reconstruction is important in solidifying exactly what strategies are utilized in response to conflict. Thus, connections can then be made between problems, responses, strategies, goals, and consequences.

The third and most conceptual stage of GPT is housed in the philosophical level. Tracy and Craig (2010) explain that this level involves creating and labeling "abstract ideals and principles that account for the selection of techniques for addressing particular kinds of problems" (p. 147). This is the most abstract tier because at this level the practice is reconstructed based on participants' archetypes and the dogma of the practice itself (Craig & Tracy, 1995). In other words, at this level the researcher labels and categorizes participants' discursive actions and expectations that the person may dismiss as *just the way I am* or *just how things happen*. Tracy (2005) specifies that "this level must be grounded in situated ideals, the

beliefs about good conduct that can be inferred from patterns of praise and blame about actual situations made by participants in the practice" (p. 305). Otherwise stated, the philosophical level of reconstruction is grounded in the assumption that all interactions during the practice are mindful, honest, and executed with the intention of either achieving or avoiding certain results. By attending to initiated comments, responsive statements and the overall structure of communication, participants' values and ideals can be inferred. Continuing with the previous example, if a parent's response to an administrator's apology for automaticity in the ARD meeting is, "That is okay, I know you are really busy," and it is said with sincerity then it can potentially be inferred that the parent values hard work and respects the duties of a campus administrator. If the same comment is made with sarcasm, it may be inferred that the parent values having a person's undivided attention and interprets anything less as disrespectful. Reconstructing a practice on all three levels provides a depth of understanding that serves as the foundation for constructing real-world theories grounded within the practice itself.

Using everyday events as focal points of research reiterates the practical component of GPT. With this intent, studies aimed at improving current practices that are riddled with both overt and covert communicative conflicts are best suited for GPT. Craig and Tracy (2011) assert that GPT has been applied to various types of communication events including academic symposiums, crisis negotiations, and public meetings (slide 7). Examples include studies of the crisis negotiation during the Waco standoff, 911 calls regarding domestic disputes, and a case study of school board meetings in Boulder Valley, Colorado (Agne & Tracy, 2001; Tracy & Agne, 2002; Tracy, 2010). As a significant yet common event in the realm of public education, ARD meetings typically include at least some measure of disagreement or dilemma. Thus, ARD meetings are suitable as the focal practice for this study through the use of GPT.

Research Design

This study focused on participants' experiences regarding how discourse was used to address dilemmas at ARD meetings. The design was informed by discourse analysis, which Tracy (2005) defines as the "study of particular segments of talk or text where excerpts are used to make scholarly arguments" (p. 302). For this study, analysis was accomplished using AIDA and the discourse included qualitative data gained through observations, document analysis, recorded (audio and video) communicative interactions during ARD meetings and conversations during interviews with participants. Through discourse analysis communicative interactions are more than simply words spoken, language used, or messages conveyed. Discourse analysis considers talk a purposeful occurrence, not simply a by-product of an event. Thus, based on the purpose of the study and the questions of inquiry guiding the study, discourse analysis was most appropriate.

Site Selection, Participant Selection and Gaining Access

As this study centered on discourse at ARD meetings in public schools, site selection was restricted to south Texas public school districts. Only districts that demonstrate overall improvement in special education collaboration between campuses and parents within the last two to three years were considered. Improvement, for the purposes of this study, was considered to be a reduction in the district's frequency of involvement in litigation in the area of special education. While such improvement may be attributed to specific benchmarks such as increased parent attendance at ARD meetings, fewer ARD meetings resulting in disagreement or reductions in litigious actions, these specific reasons were not discriminatory aspects when school districts were considered for this study. Another aspect in site selection was the convenience of the location. As indicated in the study's title, this study was conducted in

partnership with a public school district located in south Texas, which was within the regional area of my home.

I gained entry into the site based on my professional relationship with the district's Superintendent and Special Education Director. An incentive for district participation was noted due to the reason that the study was to identify current successful practices in ARD meetings; it created an opportunity for the district to be viewed as a leader in regard to this topic. Such an opportunity aided my entry into the district and campuses. The potential conflict between my roles as the researcher versus an administrator of special education in a nearby public school district was addressed personally through my journaling and bracketing, both of which will be explained in more detail later in this chapter. The participants' possible struggle with one person serving in the roles of both administrator and researcher was addressed through providing participants assurance and reiteration of the purpose of my role as a researcher. One specific example of this occurred when I was on one of the campuses to attend an ARD meeting. One of the administrators, Pat, wanted to show me a new learning area that had been constructed in the special education department. While on a brief tour, we encountered a staff member and Pat introduced me as a Director of Special Education to which I responded, "Researcher – today I am here as a researcher." Before each ARD meeting that I planned to observe and videotape, I reminded participants of the guarantee of confidentiality and clarified my role in the meeting as strictly an observer, as opposed to a participant. As a neutral and peripheral observer, my role did include neither any interaction with the ARD Committee members nor any contributions to the meeting process. My position as an observer also precluded any evaluation of compliance regarding content or procedures related to state law, federal law or local district guidelines.

Gender, race, nor ages were issues in the participant selection process. All participants were assured of anonymity by being asked to create a pseudonym for themselves that would be utilized throughout the study. Participants were also informed that a pseudonym would be applied in regard to any person, place, or specific data source directly mentioned or referred to during the study. All participants were volunteers who agreed to be involved in the study. Following solicitation, participants were provided with both oral and written explanations of what the study would be about and what would be asked of them. To ensure complete understanding and to meet the standards of informed consent, participants were provided the opportunity to ask questions and request further information from me regarding the study.

This study included both direct and indirect participants. To narrow the sample size, participant selection was the result of criterion sampling wherein participants met specific criteria (Creswell, 2007). As this study was to analyze discourse between parents of children with special needs and public school campus administrators, persons in these roles were considered direct participants. An ARD meeting requires that people other than a parent and an administrator be in attendance and as a result, people at each ARD meeting other than the parent and administrator were considered indirect participants for this study. As outlined in IRB (see Appendix B), direct participants in the study were required to meet the criteria of being either a public school campus administrator or a parent of a child currently receiving special education services in a public school district. Administrator participants were limited to those with at least one year of experience serving as the district representative in ARD meetings. Parent participants were limited to parents of a child being provided special education services at the time of the study in the same school district and on the same campus where administrator participants were employed. Additional criteria for parent participants included that they

currently be actively involved in the special education process for their child and that an ARD meeting for their child be expected to occur in the next six months. As intended, this study involved three campus administrators and three parents/sets of parents as direct participants.

Indirect participants included all other persons in attendance at the ARD meetings used in the study. A non-exhaustive list of potential indirect participants includes a general education certified teacher, a special education instructional representative, a specialized expert such as a Speech Language Pathologist or Occupational Therapist, an assessment representative as well as any person the parent chooses to bring to the meeting. The only criterion set forth for the indirect participants was that they provide their written consent to participate in the study.

Direct participants were selected first. This was accomplished via a solicitation letter after my consultation with the district's Superintendent and Director of Special Education (see Appendix C). As gatekeepers, their input provided valuable assistance in assuring that the aforementioned criteria for participants were met. Next, selected parents and campus administrators were contacted by me via phone or electronic mail based on their indicated preference on the solicitation form. A private face-to-face meeting was held with each person that demonstrated an interest in participating in the study. During this initial meeting I thoroughly explained the study, clarified their roles in the study, provided information regarding confidentiality and compensation and answered any questions proposed. Once their questions were answered to their satisfaction and they demonstrated an understanding of what was expected of them as a participant in the study, I requested and obtained their informed, written consent to participate in the study (see Appendix D). The direct participants included three parents and three administrators. Information about these participants is provided in the next section.

Once direct participants were selected, additional information regarding upcoming ARD meetings relevant to the chosen participants was collected. Such information included the scheduled date, time and location of the ARD meetings as well as persons expected to be in attendance. Next, all indirect participants who were expected to attend each ARD meeting was solicited via letter. Consent from indirect participants followed the same format mentioned above. Consent from all persons expected to be in attendance at the selected ARD meeting was be requested prior to the meeting. Once their questions were answered to their satisfaction and they conveyed an understanding of what would be expected of them as an indirect participant in the study, I requested and obtained their informed, written consent to participate in the study.

There are few, yet key differences between direct and indirect participants. These differences include that only direct participants were interviewed, were provided the opportunity to submit documents for analysis and interacted with me for data verification purposes. Likewise, only direct participants were compensated for their voluntary participation in the study. Indirect participants were not compensated for their voluntary participation in the study but were afforded the same protections and safeguards as direct participants as described in the respective solicitation letters and consent forms.

Membership Role

My membership role was that of an observer. As a peripheral participant observer at the ARD meeting, I had no interaction with any participant nor did I engage in any meeting procedures such as introductions of meeting participants or polling for consensus. According to Spradley (1980), a participant observer differs from an "ordinary participant" in six ways: dual intentions, overt attentiveness, "introspection," documentation, the intentional use of a "wide-angle lens" in perception and the "insider/outsider experience" (p. 56). As a participant observer, my level of participation was what Spradley (1980) defines as "complete

participation" (p. 61) through which the researcher is already a usual participant in the situation he/she plans to base the study on. Spradley (1980) also explains that the dual goals of a participant observer are to, "engage in the activities of the situation and observe the people, activities and physical aspects of the situation" (p. 54). However, the term "engage" should not be misinterpreted to imply that I directly, indirectly, or literally participated in the ARD meetings in any way. That I accessed my knowledge and experiences of ARD meetings while I observed these meetings may be a clearer way to explain how I "engaged" in the activity. Although I have participated in hundreds of ARD meetings in multiple roles, my role as a researcher was different from my previous experiences in ARD meetings, as I was the proverbial "fly on the wall." In the next section I provide a description of all the direct participants.

Ruby Williams

Ms. Ruby Williams is the parent of multiple children, one of whom is a child named Jack with special needs. Jack's older sister, Delilah, attended the same school. Jack's mom, Ruby, was a woman with strong opinions about anything she was aware of and a willingness to share them. Ruby gave the impression of being a person who was knowledgeable, caring, and driven. She worked as a paraprofessional in the special education department in the same district where her children attended school, but on a different campus. Ruby had worked as a paraprofessional in the area of special education for many years and on multiple campuses in the district. Her experiences as a district employee seemed to provide her with an insider advantage regarding procedures and decision-making in the district's special education programs that she has been a part of. Whether accurate based on her experiences or by definition, she did not hesitate to utilize her knowledge to press for accountability or establish ultimatums. Her combined experiences of being a parent of a child with special needs and a public school employee in the

area of special education provided her with multi-faceted perspectives. Ms. Williams spoke of her struggle in responding to these sometimes competing interests by having to choose what she perceived best as a parent while wanting something different as an education professional. She alluded to this as a struggle as she explained,

> "…he was in regular classes before. Well I had to pull him out, not only as a parent but as a professional I had to. As a parent I didn't want it, but as a professional I had to say, Okay this is what I have to do as a parent in my heart. I didn't want that."

In addition, Ruby shared that she is often sought out by other parents for advice regarding ARD meetings. She explained that her reply to parents' questions typically included telling them that,

> "… they have to speak up for their child…parents have to be responsible to know what the options are…parents have to do their part…the school is not there to be a babysitter; the school is a tool for them to use to help parents through the process of meeting the needs of their child with disabilities."

These experiences seemed to place Ruby in the role of a child advocate. Her communication, in both ARD meetings and interviews, was straightforward as she spoke with conviction about not wanting things just to get her way, but to obtain what she perceived to be best for her child. Focus is given to this source of motivation in later portions of this chapter.

Jessica Johnson

Ms. Jessica Johnson is the single parent of her only child, Jeremiah with a student with disabilities. Because the family recently moved into the district from a nearby town, Jeremiah had only been in the current school district for one year. Ms. Johnson appeared to be a patient and trusting person. She communicated quietly, directly, and intentionally. It seemed as though her preferred method of making a point was through storytelling. Explaining herself as shy, Jessica told me during an interview that she had never asked questions at the ARD meetings in

the past but she did at the meetings used in this study. When asked why she replied, "Sometimes I just need to know…" As will be revealed in more depth later in this chapter, Jessica announced at the ARD meeting that she knows she usually never asks questions and then proceeded to ask questions of various types.

Elaine Palmer

Ms. Elaine Palmer was the parent of multiple children as well, one of whom is an eight-year old boy named Abel. Abel has been attending school in his current district since the age of three. At our initial meeting Ms. Palmer presented herself as a concerned, sensitive person, intent on making sure her son was not mistreated at school. She shared information about previous school experiences in the district that adversely impacted her son. Elaine's priorities were to ensure that Abel was not mistreated or improperly disciplined. Elaine explained that her son had recently been moved to a different campus and had been attending the new campus for the past year. When she compared the two experiences, she shared that she has had an overall better experience at the new campus. Elaine volunteered information about herself as an individual and as a parent, including discipline techniques and the importance of teaching her children values such as independence and honesty.

Pat Wheeler

Pat Wheeler is a campus administrator with more than 20 years of experience in public education, many of which have been as a campus administrator in two different school districts. Pat appeared to be an insightful and scholarly person with a desire to help parents become involved in special education decision-making. Pat's knowledge of special education was apparent through efforts to effectively communicate and implement the many facets of such services and programming to others, specifically parents. Although the work as an administrator on a campus of approximately 800 students seemed frenetic, Pat was accommodating with this

schedule as a participant in the study. While Pat seemed proud of the successful relationships that were typically maintained with parents, Pat communicated that there were parents who did not trust such relationships. Pat spoke about efforts expended to create and maintain those relationships. Intentional effort was a quality of Pat's that was evident throughout the study.

Taylor Windham

With multiple years of experience as a campus administrator, Taylor Windham seemed comfortable in the special education arena of ARD meetings. Taylor came across as a knowledgeable and empathetic person. Taylor volunteered information about specific training previously received in regard to ARD meeting facilitation that has been provided through the regional educational service center. As an administrator, Taylor was attentive, made efforts to make the parent comfortable with the context of the meeting as well as the meeting itself. Taylor disclosed a belief that great value should be placed on parental participation in ARD meetings and explained that as an administrator it was bothersome when parents were either not at the ARD meeting or were in attendance but seem to "check out." The reasoning behind such disappointment will be expanded upon later in this chapter.

Adrian Archer

Adrian Archer was the campus administrator with the least amount of experience. With multiple years of experience as a classroom teacher and a coach, Adrian appeared to be a confident, intelligent, and ambitious person with a strong work ethic. As an administrator on a campus of over 700 students, Adrian maintained a hectic pace which was later self-described as a "juggling act." Throughout the study, Adrian openly shared views about special education procedures, including ways they are effective as well as how they could be improved. On one hand Adrian thrived on staying busy as a campus administrator with continuous demands on the administrator's schedule. On the other hand, Adrian expressed frustration about certain elements

of the ARD meetings such as the amount of time required in scheduling and attending these meetings. Adrian's approach to ARD meetings will be expounded upon later in this chapter.

Methods of Data Collection

Observations and interviews were the primary methods of data collection while document analysis, journaling and analytical memos served as additional data sources. In the following sections I describe the data sources in further details. An account of data collected can be found in Table 4 while a complete timeline of the study can be found in Appendix E.

Table 4

Raw Data Inventory

Data Source	Pages Per Data Source	Total Pages
1 initial meeting per participant 30 minutes each meeting	6x30 min.=3 hours 3 pages per 30 minute initial meeting	6x3=18 pages
1 observation per ARD meeting Average of 1 hour each observation	5x1=5 hours 9 pages per 1 hour observation	9x5=45 pages
1 follow-up interview per participant per ARD meeting 1 hour each interview	10x1=10 hours 14 to 28 pages per 1 hour per interview	10x21=210 pages
Consultations; 2 consultations with 2 different experts	2x2=4 consultations 4 pages of analysis per consultation	4x4=16 pages
3 Peer Debriefings with 3 different peers	3x3=9 peer debriefings 5 pages of analysis per consultation	9x5=45 pages
Journaling and memoing, Researcher journaling throughout the study	63 pages	63 pages
2 member checks with each participant	6x2= 12 member checks 4 pages per member check	4x12=48 pages
Researcher memoing as needed for reflection and insight	10 pages of memoing	10 pages
Total		455 pages

Observations

Observations occurred as I videotaped the ARD meetings. Informed by Spradley (1980), my focus during the observations was to survey the actions, physical aspects, and the people involved in the occurrence. Although discourse analysis is the method of this study, my observations were not solely communication-based. Observations could also include the study of a process (Creswell, 2007) which, in this case, was an ARD meeting. The observations were descriptive and included as much detail as possible about participants, procedures, location, and materials distributed in the meeting. My observation protocol, based on Spradley's (1980) nine dimensions of observation, and can be found in Appendix F.

As mentioned previously, additional data for analysis included notes and analytical memos. These notes taken at the site of a study can be explained as hunches about occurrences that includes the context of an event (Patton, 2002). Also considered a general term for documented observations and spontaneous talk, field notes are taken while in the setting (field) of one's research. In an effort to supplement the audio-recording of the ARD meetings, field notes were taken during each ARD meeting. Having first-hand experiences and in-depth knowledge of the practice, I used this form of note taking to intentionally record details that I instinctively may have dismissed because of my familiarity. An example of field notes is provided in Figure 2.

Admin. lead conversation this time…why different?. Used "mom" this ARD – why?
Figure2. Example of Field Notes.

In addition to recording questions, field notes can also be notes that are used to document the observation events, actions, process in further details. Once a researcher completes observations in the field, s/he would expand those notes as soon as possible after observation.

Spradley (1980) shares important features of expanded field notes that include paying attention to accuracy in recording exactly who said what to whom, recording details and noting specific language that is used including event-specific jargon, versus making researcher-based broad-stroke generalizations. Expanded field notes were written as soon as possible following each ARD meeting and, as the name indicates, elaborated on elements that may have only been briefly documented during the meeting. For example, field notes made during the ARD meeting about a person's habit of saying "Um" were expanded further in field notes for reflections and triangulation with other data sources (see Figure 3). This information was used in combination with the audio-recordings and video-recordings in later analysis and interpretation of discourse.

Interesting that Admin. participated so much more…even lead the discussions instead of . listening an jumping in when needed. My thought: giving "mom" news that "mom" may not like (no more services, program completion) so is this is an effort to be friendly so that bad news does not seem like an attack (because a friend would not attack another friend). Did parent notice? Ask her in interview. Also bring to the attention of admin. – was that done with intention?

Figure 3. Example of Expanded Field Notes.

Analytical memos served as a mirror of my thoughts and mental processing. Described by Bogard (2011), analytical memos are the "dumping grounds" (p. 60) for the researcher's thoughts about both the research data and the research process. Similarly, Saldana (2011) explains an analytical memo as a "think piece of reflexive freewriting" (p. 96). In other words, memoing serves as a type of meta-analysis intended to expand the depth of understanding and reveal the reasoning behind decisions and determinations that I made throughout the study. As a

result, analytical memos were an insightful source of data. An example of an analytical memo can be found in Figure 4 below.

She was very quiet. The ARD meeting started at 12:32 and she did not speak until 12:47. Even then she only spoke in response to a question. Elaine did not initiate communication until 12:58 and that was to explain her actions (about meds). So she did not voluntarily speak for the first 26 minutes of the meeting. She spent most of her time watching everyone discuss her son Abel– she reminded me of a wallflower at a dance with the ARD meeting being the music and the ARD members being the other people at the dance. What would it take to bring her onto the dance/interaction floor? How can they get her involved? An invitation? I think it would take a request from someone she trusts. Does the school staff equate her silence with agreement?

Figure 4. Example of Analytical Memo

Figure 4 is an analytical memo written after the ARD with Elaine Palmer. This note describes my struggle to make sense of how the ARD Committee members could expect Elaine to be involved in the meeting when they seemed to do little to facilitate that. While Elaine had great eye contact with staff, which demonstrated that they had her undivided attention, because she rarely spoke and had a flat affect made me wonder if she did not understand what was being discussed or did not care enough to provide input. I later discovered that neither of my contemplations was correct. Elaine understood everything that went on at the meeting and had strong opinions about some issues but had intentionally chosen not to speak because she did not want lose control and be inappropriately angry through her words or actions. Her choice reminded me of the adage, “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.”

As a result, it will be imperative for opportunities to be created so that parents can say something instead of saying nothing at all.

Interviews

Following the ARD meetings, individual interviews were held with each direct participant in order to develop an in-depth understanding of their experiences. The function of the interview in qualitative research as described by MacCraken (1998) resonated with my subjectivities; "…to take us into the lifeworld of the individual …to step into the mind of the other person" (p. 9). The choice of the interview as a method of gathering data comes naturally for me based on my instinctive nature to communicate and build relationships with others as well as my genuine desire to understand the experience of others. As explained by deMarrias (2004), I sought to "…gain in-depth knowledge from participants through long, focused conversations" (p. 52). Here the term *conversation* alludes to the spontaneous exchanges that the interviews include versus a strict question/answer format. In AIDA specifically, the interview is a key source not only of the participants' experiences and perspectives, but also as a "…metadiscourse about the interactive discourse" (Tracy, 1995, p. 199). In other words, while the goal of the interview is to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's experiences during the annual ARD meeting, the conversation may also include dialogue about discourse that occurred during the practice or is occurring during the interview.

In an interview, attentive responses to shared content are more important than adherence to predetermined structure. MacCracken (1998) writes that the interview is one of the "most powerful methods in qualitative research" (p. 9), while Charmaz (2006) explains that the interviewer seeks not only to learn about the participants' experiences, but also their perception of their experiences. Otherwise stated, perception is reality, and each person's reality changes with the influences of such elements as beliefs, actions, and interactions. Charmaz (2006) seems

to echo Creswell's (2007) opinion regarding the need for the participant to do the majority of the talking during an interview. According to Charmaz (2006), the *prerogatives* that the participant has during the interview include being the specialist on the topic, deciding what to tell, articulating viewpoints and "expressing thoughts and feelings disallowed in other relationships and settings" (p. 27). In order for participants to be comfortable enough to exercise such *prerogatives*, I attempted to create an atmosphere of trust and openness as I interacted with the participants.

For interviews, I reviewed Margot Eyring's (1998) writings about boundary-based dilemmas that can develop regarding relationships. In the eyes of the participants, I may have represented multiple roles during the interview such as an authority, a researcher, a person of influence, or a professional peer. As a result, I put forth extended efforts to keep the boundaries of my roles clearly defined. However, the participants sometimes blurred the boundaries but never to the extent that jeopardized the study, but only to the extent in how they related to me in my various roles. It was challenging for me to maintain role boundaries throughout the interview exchanges as I tend to quickly seek and sometimes press for personal relationships with others. Similarly, I grapple within my thought processes as I identified with Eyring's (1998) struggle of "Knowing when to know and when not to know…to keep a clear distinction in my mind about the difference between common knowledge and insider knowledge" (p. 144). Because I know things about parental relationships with campus administration from both peripheral and experience-based perspectives, it was at times awkward for me to ask questions that I would seemingly already know the answer to. Consequently, my efforts were exceptionally focused on drawing out the participants' experiences while being aware of my personal and professional positions.

Semi-structured interviews were used to encourage each participant to share his/her responses to the interactions that occurred specifically during the ARD meeting. Although a strictly conversational interview may be more effective at eliciting uncensored input, I was well aware of the limitations of my ability to stay on topic. As a result, I used a semi-structured interview format that included pre-planned, open-ended questions meant to elicit descriptive details from the participant through conversation. deMarrias (2004) uses the term "conversational" (p. 53) to describe a type of interview that is synonymous with a semi-structured interview. Her discussion includes using the interview strictly as a guide, so that instead of having the interview just be a back and forth, tennis-type exchange of questions and answers, the interviewer allows the participant to take the lead in a conversational manner (deMarrias, 2004). This informal semi-structured format is also expected to facilitate spontaneous exchanges while nurturing the participant to lead me through his/her thoughts, opinions with great depth and detail. Interview questions included: (a) If dilemmas occur at an ARD meeting, what are some typical phrases I would hear before, during and/or after the dilemma? (b) Describe a dilemma that occurred at an ARD meeting that was resolved to your satisfaction and explain how communication was conducted, and (c) Help me understand some things that could be said at an ARD meeting that would help resolve a dilemma. In addition, I used clarifying questions and probes to solicit expanded responses from participants as needed. Complete interview protocols can be found in Appendix G.

In preparing for interviews, I remained cognizant of deMarrias' (2004) list of five hindrances to a successful interview which can be abridged as (a) asking "long, complicated questions," (b) asking "yes-or-no questions," (c) asking questions that are "vague or deal with generalities rather than specific details of events or experiences," (d) asking "leading questions"

based on the interviewer's theories or beliefs and (d) when the interviewer "fails to recognize clues or markers…that may be a signal that there is something more to be shared…" (p. 67). Without considering the context and the purpose of the interview in qualitative research, each of these actions could be perceived as acceptable techniques. However, understanding that the mission of a qualitative interview is to gain insight into the participant's experiences via the participant's words, stories and perspectives, each of the above-mentioned actions could derail that quest. Thus, throughout the interviews I worked diligently to be a "good listener rather than a frequent speaker" (Creswell, 2007, p. 134).

To foster relaxation and trust, each interview was held at a place preferred by the participant. Interviews were intended to be conducted within 48 hours of the ARD meeting, if not immediately afterwards. This occurred for three of the five ARD meetings. A delay of not more than five days occurred with administrators regarding a few of the ARD meetings due to their hectic schedules. Of the two ARD meetings after which the interviews were not conducted within 48 hours, one was due to my error and the other was at the request of the administrator. My error was that I failed to interview Ruby Williams or Pat Wheeler after their first ARD meeting together. This occurred for many reasons including my inexperience as a researcher, my heightened excitement of the "drama" of the meeting that I interpreted as prime data for my study and my intention to transcribe the meeting as soon as possible afterwards. Also, the distraction of having two people in the ARD that were not expected resulted in me being preoccupied with obtaining their consent to participate in the study. I realized my error after the second ARD meeting with Ruby and Pat as I prepared for their individual interviews. Because of the timeliness of this realization, I was able to ask questions during both interviews that referenced the first ARD meeting as well as the second. While this did result in less data for

analysis, it also increased my alertness and provided the opportunity for me and both participants to independently reflect on both ARD meetings at the same time. These reflections supported a more holistic outlook and I believe aided each of us in perceiving a summative outcome of both meetings versus two separate outcomes.

Regarding the second situation, a different ARD meeting was held immediately after the ARD meeting for my study in which Taylor Windham served as the administrator. I waited until the second ARD meeting was completed, approximately an hour, so that I could interview Taylor. However, after completing the second ARD Taylor conveyed that the two ARD meetings in a row had resulted in personal exhaustion and requested that we reschedule the interview for two days later. I complied and the interview was held approximately two days later.

Data Management and Analysis

Data management for this study included the use of a video camera, the software program EndNote as well as transcription playback software Express Scribe. EndNote served as a bibliographic directory while Express Scribe was utilized to play back the audiotaped interviews and ARD meetings. Express Scribe allowed me to store the audio data in labeled files on my phone and email the audio data to myself for transcription. This software program also allowed me to control the speed and placement of audio playback with the function keys on my laptop computer. Physical management of the data consisted of an organizational system for both printed and electronic sources of data in a secure room in my home. In order to maintain confidentiality, all data were stored in locked cabinets in my home while electronic data were accessible with a password known only by me.

Data analysis was informed by Action-Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA), an inductive process of working through problems in communication. By utilizing this relatively

new methodology, I subscribed to Lindlof and Taylor's (2011) declaration that, "…communication researchers must overcome their preferences for sage and familiar use of qualitative methods…they must use them boldly to link the integrity of everyday life to changing global conditions" (p. 16). Introduced by Karen Tracy in 1995, AIDA is a "methodological reasoning procedure" (Tracy, 1995, p. 197) for analyzing discourse directly related to communicative dilemmas within a practice. In other words, AIDA utilizes discourse analysis methods used to uncover reasons behind dilemmas and highlight alignment or misalignment between the participants' perceptions, performance and their ideations of the way a specific practice should occur. While (Gee, 2011) explains that, "Discourse analysis can illuminate problems and controversies in the world" (p. 10), AIDA extends a step further to generate applicable techniques that can be implemented to improve or at least address problems within a practice, versus offering a theory to explain or justify elements of a practice. In presenting such recommendations, it was imperative that I had extensive knowledge about the practice being studied in order to develop a thorough understanding of how the participants talked to each other, how they talked about each other and how they talked about themselves as a group (Tracy, 2005). This is another reiteration of how the use of AIDA is context-laden and focuses not only on discourse, but also in how discourse reveals action and how action can alter discourse.

(Craig & Tracy (2006) explain, "Action-implicative discourse analysis is the methodological arm of GPT; it specifies how to select, transcribe and analyze practical discourse to accomplish GPT's metatheoretical aims" (p. 12). In other words, the methodology of AIDA accomplishes the goal of GPT. With a stance complimentary to that of GPT, AIDA is intended "…to develop practical, useful, 'morally defensible' reconstructions of interactional practices, conversational techniques and situated ideals of a variety of communicative practices… " (Tracy

& Craig, 2010, p. 162). Thus, by reconstructing problems, strategies and ideals through discourse analysis, AIDA can accomplish at least two things: (a) expose inconsistencies between expectations and actions of self, others and the event as a whole, and (b) provide action-based suggestions for minimizing those inconsistencies. Such analysis yields action-based recommendations for participants regarding their discursive choices in handling dilemmas within that practice.

As mentioned in chapter two, discourse analysis is a broad field. Gee (2011) defines discourse analysis as "…the study of language in use" (p. 8). Although AIDA certainly includes studying what language is used and how it is used, "…it is centrally interested in describing the problems, interactional strategies and ideals-in-use within existing communicative practices" (Tracy & Craig, 2010, p. 146). Through AIDA, spontaneous discourse surrounding conflicts that occur in a specific social event is used to identify and describe problems. AIDA is then used to describe how participants handle the issues, and using both overt and covert data gathered, exposes what participants consider to be their ideation of that event. R.T. Craig and Tracy (1995) describe AIDA as "a discourse-analytic approach that works to provide normative understandings of situated communicative practices that are action-implicative for social life" (p. 1). This methodology provides outcomes intended to assist practitioners in achieving what they idealize as the best ways to accomplish goals within a focal practice. Thus, as a form of inductive analysis, the intention of AIDA informed by GPT is to conceptualize theoretical ideas that can be used to identify strategies for practice to improve both the event and the event outcomes for all participants.

AIDA is similar to general discourse analysis methodologies but involves distinctive assumptions. One of these is that, as with GPT, AIDA draws on "…the Aristolean idea of term

of phronesis - good judgment, prudence, practical wisdom, sound and thoughtful deliberation, reasonableness – as its key concept" (Tracy, 2008, p. 150). This assumption precludes the analysis from getting mired in participants' manipulations or hidden agendas, or other elements that participants may not even recognize in themselves much less be willing to reflect upon.

Another assumption of AIDA is that the path of most communication events is forged by interactions surrounding dilemmas (Tracy, 2008). Based on this assumption, AIDA focuses on problem-rich segments of discourse. Although all dialogue can be considered valuable in a discourse analysis method, discourse selected for transcription using AIDA is done purposefully in order to expose problems that participants may not realize and to reveal how their own actions may be contributing to the those problems. Discourse that is not directly related to a problem may not be transcribed, as it would not typically alter the course or outcome of the event. As a result, concentrated attention is given to dilemmas which then become the building blocks for learning how to improve ways that such dilemmas can be handled.

Additionally, AIDA presumes that communication during a practice is rhetorical and participants make conversational moves based on how they perceive the problem (Tracy, 1995). In other words, a person's perception of a problem will determine what action they take in response to that problem. For example, the difference between one session of speech therapy per week versus two sessions per week may be a concern for a parent while the Speech Pathologist may consider the reduced amount to be the result of student progress. AIDA maintains that behavior is the result of intentional choice and, through reflection, participants can come to conclusions about how to interact in a way that leads to the achievement or avoidance of certain outcomes (Tracy, 2005). This assumption allows the researcher to analyze discourse at face value. As a result, the effectiveness of the study will be partially based upon whether or not the

participants are willing to be reflexive as well as take practical action based on the study's outcome.

Traditionally, scientific studies begin with a theory and then seek to prove or disprove that theory. However, "Normative theory is centrally concerned with what ought to be; it seeks to articulate normative ideals by which to guide the conduct and criticism of practice" (Craig & Tracy, 1995). In other words, with a future-focused intention of what ought to be, the test of a practical theory is its usefulness. Practical theory, in the discipline of communication, seeks to reconstruct communicative practices in an effort to develop normative theories about the practice (Tracy, 1995). In the case of AIDA, the question of effectiveness relates to the theory's practicality in helping practitioners think about the communicative event as they contemplate how to act (Tracy, 1995). Otherwise stated, if participants reflect upon their discursive choices that occurred during the practice, comprehend the theories presented as the outcomes of the study and recognize how they contribute to the improvement the practice, then those theories are practical. Taking it a step further, if the participants choose to act on their new understanding and the practice improves, then the practicality of the theories is even more exemplified. However, the practicality of the theory is contingent on the participants' willingness to adopt it. Therefore, researchers can conceptualize theoretical ideas which can be mapped onto strategies for improvement. But until the key stakeholders adopt those strategies the potential of practical theory and its application remains hidden.

Discourse analysis is an umbrella term that is used in reference to multiple approaches to the analysis of communication, many of which share similar features. Gee (2011) explains that theories and methods centered on communication are the studies of how we use language "…to say things, to do things and to be things" (p. 3). To discern different types of discourse analysis

one has to include the theoretical focus, the types of contextual data utilized, the role they play and the sources of discourse. What distinguishes discourse analysis from other communication methodologies is the commitment to recording and transcribing specifics elements of dialogue, performing in-depth analysis of the data and then using the outcomes as evidence of theoretical claims (Tracy, 1995). As illustrated in Table 5, AIDA can best be understood when matched to other discourse analysis methodologies by noting their differences and similarities.

Table 5

Comparison of Discourse Analytic Approaches

	CA	IS	CDA	DP	AIDA
Metatheoretical Approach	Empirical	Interpretive	Critical	Interpretive	Interpretive/ Critical
Theoretical Focus	Location and nature of social action structuring processes	How linguistic and sense-making is shaped by culture	Role of talk/text in maintaining power relationships and accomplishing resistance	Rhetorical and linguistically constructive nature of psychological processes	Problems, conversational techniques and situated ideals of a practice
Kinds of Contextual Information	Strictly within text (context= immediately prior talk)	Interviews with focal cultural members to check interpretations	Historical, social, political conditions at time of text	Description of rhetorical situation (speaker goals, audience, situation)	Description of rhetorical (gained via interviews and observations)
Dominant Text Type	Informal everyday exchanges	Institutional and interpersonal exchanges between culturally different people	Public texts, (e.g. newspapers) about social controversies (racism)	Talk situations in which persons experience conflict within self or with another	Routine institutional occasions in which actors experience problems

CA = conversational analysis IS = interactional sociolinguistics, CDA = critical discourse analysis, DP = discursive psychology, AIDA – action implicative discourse analysis

Note. Adapted from "Action-Implicative Discourse Analysis." by Karen Tracy, 1995, *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 14(1-2),* p. 207. Copyright 1995 by SAGE Publications.

Beginning with the most traditional method of discourse analysis, conversational analysis and AIDA both share a commitment to everyday communication exchanges and the practice of repetitive cycles of listening to discourse during which the researcher attends to different discursive elements each time (Tracy, 1995). A key difference between these approaches can be found in theoretical intention. Karen Tracy (personal communication, January 31, 2012) explains AIDA as a simplified version of conversational analysis in which the strategic use of language and disagreements are the central focus. While conversational analysis seeks to explain actions at a literal level through description, AIDA, takes an interpretive approach in analyzing communicative actions at a conceptual level by describing the connotation of actions in order to construct meaning through interpretation (Atkinson, 1988; Buttny, 1993; Tracy, 2005).

A different method of discourse analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, has been defined as an approach that "focuses on the interplay of linguistic, contextual and social presuppositions that interact to create the communication conditions" (Gumperz & Gumperz, 2006, p. 70) for a specific practice. Tracy (1995) discusses the goal of interactional linguistics as developing an understanding of differences between people in order to minimize misinterpretations and stereotypical judgments. When comparing AIDA and interactional sociolinguistics, similarities include that they both draw information from a variety of context-rich sources, they both prioritize the development of in-depth understanding of communicative problems in order to improve future communication efforts, and they both focus on problematic communications. However, AIDA focuses on problems within an institutional or societal practices that are not "conversationally formatted" (Tracy, 2005, p. 313) while interactional sociolinguistics typically focuses on cultural differences between the participants within the practice. AIDA focuses on

interactional differences within discourse in a practice through the form of social conflict in order to reveal how those differences can be minimized following participant self-reflection.

Another type of discourse analysis is critical discourse analysis. This methodology studies how, "…social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context….in order to understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality" (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 352). Otherwise stated, critical discourse analysis focuses on how verbal and written communication are used to reveal disparities, to further any abuse of power or to implement mandates of authority, whether overtly or covertly. Wodak (1999) explains that through critical discourse analysis, one is "making contradictions apparent" (p. 186), thus the process of critical discourse analysis seeks to improve the future by making wrongs known and thus reducing the consequences of such wrong doings. In contrast, AIDA centers its efforts on how the practice itself could be improved. Although both approaches seek to "meld moral argument with empirical observation" (Tracy, 1995, p. 205) for the purpose of improvement, AIDA does so without the finding fault or blame and places the responsibility of the improvement of the practice upon the participants' actions.

Of the discourse analysis approaches reviewed in Table 4, discursive psychology has the most in common with AIDA. Discursive psychology investigates how inner-mind elements of psychology are addressed, labeled, interpreted and referred to through discourse (Edwards & Potter, 2005). Discursive psychology and AIDA both focus on problems within a communicative event and are based on the presumption that dilemmas are the unavoidable result of competing goals. Additionally, both methods address social interaction through a rhetorical lens by assuming that participants' intentionally plan and execute communicative actions to advance their goal (Tracy, 2005; Tracy, 1995). In spite of these similarities, the difference in

theoretical the intention of each approach is distinctive. Discursive psychology confronts traditional psychological interpretations of perception, attitude, memory, etc. as it addresses "issues of reality and the mind" (Tracy, 1995, p. 205). AIDA, however, is concerned with understanding and nurturing communicative practices in an effort to contribute to the improvement of those practices. While discursive psychology seeks to gain clarity through comparison of interpretations, AIDA strives to gain knowledge in order to advance practices.

In contrast to other such approaches, AIDA addresses not only discourse itself, but also the process of how discourse is used to address conflict and how specific actions of participants can improve the discourse within a focal, social practice. Tracy (1995) explains that AIDA is "…centrally concerned with understanding, critiquing and cultivating communication practices…in social life" (p. 206). Because of the use of data from actual communication events, insights from the event's participants and proposed recommendations to improve those specific events as well as the skill set of participants, it can be said that AIDA is the "working man's" methodology of discourse analysis. Otherwise stated, through AIDA the people involved in the practice work to improve the practice for themselves more so than for the practice itself.

Although similar to general discourse analysis methodologies, AIDA includes distinctive differences. "The information about a practice that is gleaned from observation, interviews, and study of documents allows an AIDA researcher to build discourse interpretations that go beyond the meanings participants may be orienting to in interactional moments" (Tracy, 2005, p. 313). By attending to covert, implied information more so than direct information intentionally shared by a participant, I gained insight in order to scaffold meanings and ideals through information that was communicated unintentionally, indirectly or inferred.

The first task of AIDA, according to Tracy (2005) is to name the practice to be studied. There are many types of ARD meetings, such as an annual ARD, a temporary ARD, an amendment ARD, a discipline ARD or a permanent placement ARD. For this study, the practice was referred to simply as an ARD meeting since no specific type of ARD meeting was targeted. Next, the researcher must possess or develop an in-depth and extensive knowledge of the practice to be studied (Tracy, 2005). Over the course of my nineteen years of experience in education, with fourteen of those being in the area of special education, I have attended hundreds of ARD meetings and have served on ARD Committees in all roles (general education teacher, special education representative, assessment representative, content expert and campus administrator) with the exception of parent. As a result of my long history of involvement in the institute of education, I have thorough knowledge and wide-ranging experiences regarding ARD meetings.

The next step in AIDA is to identify spontaneous conversational segments for transcription and analysis (Tracy, 2005). These are sections of discourse that take place during either the practice or the follow up interviews. The circumstances in which the dialogue occurs (during the practice or during the interview) impact what information is shared by participants. Unlike typical discourse analysis which may analyze all discourse during a given event, AIDA intentionally focuses on segments of discourse wherein conflict is evident. Tracy (2005) explains,

> …selecting segments of discourse to be transcribed is a theoretically shaped activity because one goal of AIDA is to understand the problems of a practice, moments in which participants seem to be experiencing discomfort, tension, or conflict are especially likely for focus. (p. 310)

In other words, the decision of which portions of discourse to use for analysis intentionally gives preference to exchanges involving anguish or distress, which typically indicate that participants are involved in conflict. This technique resulted in various amounts of data that was based on the verbal engagement of parents and administrators. For example, in her ARD meeting, Elaine Palmer was quiet thus there were very few dilemmatic exchanges between her and the administrator which yielded only four pages of transcription. On the other hand, the second ARD with Ruby Williams involved many moments of discursive tensions which resulted in 27 pages of transcription. Additional segments of discourse suitable for AIDA are those that include judgment of others as well as those interactions wherein behavior seems to be at odds with how either the institution or participants describe themselves (Tracy, 2005). An example related to this study includes discourse regarding the determination of eligibility for special education, a decision that requires all ARD members to be in consensus regarding the characteristically nebulous question of whether or not the student demonstrates an educational need for a service. Unless the answer to this question is obvious and supported by data gathered and shared by all ARD Committee the members, this topic can prove to be a rich source of conflict.

Another element considered in selecting discourse for analysis includes what type of data is focused on within the dialogue. Unlike other types of discourse analysis that focus on timing, prosody, word count or turn taking, AIDA's primary focus is on aspects of communication that occur spontaneously, which participants can control and later reflect upon (Tracy, 2005). Examples of these "talk particles" (Tracy, 2005, p. 311) include word choices, arguments, story organization, and speech acts such as interruptions, speaking over another person, false starts, repetitions, vocal demonstrations of understanding or disagreement and verbal fillers such as

"Uh" or "Um." As such aspects of communication typically occur over the course of several, extended verbal interactions, lengthy segments of dialogue are typically selected for transcription. Specifically, while there was dissention between parents and other ARD Committee members and sometimes even amongst school staff, I transcribed only discourse at that surrounded dilemmas between the parents and administrators. Transcription of the ARD meetings was segmented and titled according to the topic that raised issues of tension. Beside the title was the time that the discussion occurred on the audiotape. Following are examples:

ENGLISH COURSES 47:38

ADRIAN: We need to make some decisions a couple of things in order to either accept Jeremiah's credit this year and then have him be able to go on …. Let's start with language arts. Originally a- according to our record Jeremiah had uh>>> English 3 and English 4 which he received here on our campus and and RR -

JESSICA: Can I ask what's English 1?

ADRIAN: English 1 would be uh>>> your entry level English and then English 2 would be next and then 3 and then 4 and then all students need to have uh>>> at least 4 years of uh language.

FINAL CEREMONIES 51:52

ADRIAN: And we'll assist you with that anything that you need to make sure that it gets ordered or any uh>>> support services you need in order to get that done we'll make sure that happens.

JESSICA: Okay uh>>>what about his ring? Does he get one or no?

ADRIAN: That is something that a parent would purchase through Ringmasters and we can get you their contact information but the school district doesn't purchase completion rings for students, that's always a family decision.

The length of the segments selected for transcription is another attribute of AIDA that differentiates it from other discourse analysis methodologies. The entirety of the above conversation occurred in 17 exchanges. In these exchanges there were no overlapping speeches by Jessica or Adrian. However, Adrian had four instances of repetitions. Both Jessica and Adrian repaired their phrasing once during this exchange. Neither of them interrupted anyone but Adrian had 13 instances of voice fillers while Jessica had only one. Voice fillers are extension of a word, phrase, or a sound that extends the length of one's speech.

Discourse segments revolving around dissention can be determined by certain parameters. These parameters include arguments in their entirety, complete stories that are in support of a position and include any concepts, positions or stances of advocacy. In contrast to general discourse analysis, the expected outcome is lengthy segments of dialogue for transcription. An example related to ARD meetings is discussion surrounding special education services being recommended. These conversations typically involve the reiteration of previous special education services and student progress, examples of how the amount of services is directly correlated to the student's progress and projections of how a change in services may affect the student's progress. Using this example, I used data analysis to identify how the same argument could be used to propel opposing viewpoints. The consideration of multiple ideas, perspectives and opinions about a single service is typically a lengthy conversation that can sometimes end in disagreement. Such disagreement can lead to the opportunity for negotiation. Prior to this study, my experience had been that discourse regarding eligibility for special

education services is rarely a short discussion without hesitations, reiterations and multiple efforts to present one's case in a variety of ways. As a result, it was reasonable for me to expect that the dialogue centered on special education eligibility and services being provided to the student would be protracted conversations that included the above mentioned units of talk making them prime data for analysis. As the ARD meetings utilized in this study were not initial meetings, student eligibility was not a contentious element. Instructional services and the student's response to those services are the topics that provided the lengthiest exchanges incorporating 45-83 conversational turns.

After selecting specific segments of dialogue for analysis, the next step of AIDA is transcription. AIDA transcription captures all words, partial words, vocal noises, hesitations and other verbal and vocal elements that are part of a person's message (Tracy, 2005). As an example, transcription is done while listening to the discourse with a focus on trying "…to capture overlapping speech because interruptions are things that people attach meaning to" (K. Tracy, personal communication, January 31, 2012). Tracy (personal communication, January 31, 2012) advises that the researcher do transcription in multiple rounds of listening wherein more detail is added to the transcription each time. Specific steps include: (a) record all words, part words and vocal sounds, contractions are allowable but use no punctuation; (b) indicate overlapping speaking with left brackets, and (c) add simple punctuation to capture the way the participants talk and make the transcript readable by other people who are not discourse analysts (K. Tracy, personal communication, January 31, 2012). Noting a key difference from other discourse analysis techniques, AIDA transcription does not address speech timing, prosody, intonation, cadence, length of pauses or grammatical punctuation (Tracy, 2005). In other words, while typical discourse analysis transcription involves extensive detail using short sections of

dialogue, referred to as “narrow” (Gee, 2011a, p. 117), AIDA transcription includes longer sections of dialogue with an intermediate level of detail in its transcription, sometimes referred to as “broad” transcription (Gee, 2011a, p. 117). When comparing transcription through AIDA with transcription involved in other types of discourse analysis, the issue can be seen as one of quantity versus quality arises (Tracy, 1995). Typical discourse includes short excerpts of discourse transcribed with extensive detail, sometimes even when a breath was taken. However, longer segments of discourse are analyzed with AIDA and there is less detail in the transcription.

> AIDA seeks to go beyond what is visibly displayed to speak to issues of what routinely may be inferred as it draws on relevant contextual information made available through participation, observation and interviewing to inform and interpretation of the a text. (Tracy, 1995, p. 203)

For example, it is common for people to have hidden agendas, to be unaware of the impact of their speech or for their actions to be incongruent with expectations of themselves, other participants or the communicative event. AIDA serves as a tool to reveal these issues, identify them, offer strategies to handle them successfully and the opportunity for participants to take action toward self-improvement. The focus on longer segments of dialogue and the use of less detailed transcription reiterates the conceptual approach to discourse analysis through AIDA. Regarding the length of discourse segments, a non-example was Elaine’s interaction during the ARD meeting. Although the meeting lasted approximately an hour and a half, there were only three situations in which tension was notable. Within these three sections, Elaine spoke only seven times; she made one suggestion, asked one question, made one reference to Abel’s behavior at home and made four statements of agreement. Multiple examples of dialogue with

transcription markers can be found throughout this document. However, another example of transcription below comes from an interview with Ruby:

> You need to be open minded about everything not just let's go by the book. Yes we have to follow the policies and procedures, not every kids the same. Don't tell me this need to be done it n- don't tell me we have to follow this schedule because these other kids have to be in there no. You have to be – or you gotta be flexible. It's not just about oh like this year had to be this way because this is what I have to teach him, this is why he can't be in art. Was that fair to him? No it wasn't fair to him. Just because you know you have to have enough staff to make everything flow, make everything happen but in an ARD meeting when there's conflict you have to be open minded. You gotta hear each other. If you don't hear each other and no its this stuff or just say oh, we gotta hurry up we gotta finish there's a lot of that because everybody has to leave.

As can be noted with this example, it is lengthy and there are no transcription markers for elements such as timing, changes in tone, rate of speech, prosody, or volume.

Following transcription, I closely analyzed each segment and identified communication-based dilemmas from the participants' perspectives and conversational strategies used by participants in handling these problems. Then, I labeled these strategies. An example of this process is noted in Table 6 below:

Table 6

Labeling Strategies of Parents

Dialogue Indicating Dilemma	Dilemma	Response	Strategy
He's finished with his IEP he's mastered them all and she's dismissing him from speech.	Disagreement	Okay um so he- he finish his speech?	Ask Questions
Like I said I can't commit to which one okay?	Not getting what is wanted	Just one of them.	Ultimatum
Ms. Long just discussed that he's able to go in and cook and turn on the stove however uh you don't let him do that at home but you might try uh with some supervision to see if he can do that.	Judgment of others	I don't let him cook 'cause I'm scared 'cause he might burn one of my dogs or burn me or burn himself 'cause he-he burned himself one time	Storytelling

In an ARD meeting, there is a smorgasbord of dilemmas that can arise, some of which may include the campus administrator minimizing the input of others to rush through the meeting, a teacher requesting additional staff as a stipulation of agreeing to have the student in her classroom or a parent's spontaneous request to audiotape the meeting. Following is an example:

RUBY: What other kind of techniques?

SARAH: As far as jobs?

RUBY: Well you said techniques so I'm thinking there's [more than one]

PAT: [more than one] yes

SARA: (Teacher) Uh as far as looking for jobs as far as this one this graded one (clears throat) well if I- if it were me

PAT: Well no [let's let's RR just] we can we can follow back up with Ms. Whitsitt.

RUBY: [I know what you'd do] [yeah] Okay.

Ruby's question about additional techniques may be perceived by the campus administrator as an aggressive act of mistrust while she may view it as holding others accountable. Not intended to be a complete list, my experience yields that some conversational strategies used to handle problems such as these may include the repetition of information (whether requested or not), questions of clarification, requests for examples of recommendations or summative statements. An example of a summative statement might be, "So we all agree that Mary is doing well, right?" which presumes consensus, therefore, making it uncomfortable for anyone to disagree. Identifying the problems of the practice relies mainly on interview discourse (Tracy, 1995). Through conversation during interviews, conflicts that arose during the meeting may be uniquely identified by each participant. I perceived these conflicts in an unique way too. Thus, the identification, labeling, and reconstruction of problems required the incorporation of multiple perspectives as well as various interpretations. For example, the dilemma of parental participation was communicated by all participants. Through the analysis of discourse, phrases and terms used to directly express the dilemma of parental participation or refer to this as a concern were recorded in the categories of parents and administrators in the order that the ARD meetings occurred. Each phrase was also labeled according to its author with PW representing Wheeler, TW for Windham, JJ for Jessica Johnson, and so on. Next, the dilemma was given a letter (A) for sorting purposes and each time the issue was raised either during the ARD meeting or interview discourse, that text was marked with a circled "A". The next step was to review all

“A” information, determine its frequency and determine whether it was a dilemma for the individual speaker the group or not a dilemma at all. Topics mentioned repeatedly by all members of a group were determined to be a dilemma for the group while topics brought up by individuals were declared a dilemma only if they were prevalent over the course of the interview. Table 7 provides an example of this activity:

Table7

Determining Dilemmas

Phrase (Author)	Topic	Sorting Letter	Frequency of Topic for All Participants in One Group (Parent//Admin.)	Dilemma for Group?	Dilemma for the Individual?
Once against them all (JJ)	Involvement	A	16	Yes	Yes
Just there to get a paycheck (RW)	Attention	B	4	No	Yes
At one point I was like do you have something wrong with my son (EP)	Worry About What Others Think	C	7	Yes	Yes
There's a danger when you start to rush an ARD (TW)	Attention	B	2	No	No
That is how it is supposed to be driven. It doesn't always happen that way. (AA)	Time Off Task	D	6	No	Yes

Creating and labeling groups of strategies was the next step of analysis. Referred to as coding, Saldana (2011) explains that, "…coding is the transitional process between data analysis and more extensive data analysis" (p. 4). In other words, a code is a way to systematically encapsulate or condense data into a smaller unit in a meaningful way (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Typically the first step in data analysis, coding is used to organize data into groups, referred to as categories. Saldana (2011) advocates, "…qualitative codes are essence-capturing essential elements of the research that, when clustered together according to similarity and regularity – a pattern – they actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their

connections" (p. 8). To state it another way, coding is reiterative in that the researcher will go through multiple cycles of revisiting and analyzing data to create codes that are built upon and combined to create categories, which reflect the associations among and between the data. Coding is a lengthy process that occurs both during and after data gathering through which a web of data is created. This web then links the data to proposed concepts about the data to form a supportive system for the creation of new theories. I coded each meeting and interview transcript for elements such as agreement, disagreement, compromise, acknowledgment and restatement.

Coding consisted of identifying strategies, labeling strategies and placing them into groups. The identification of conversational strategies is based primarily on analysis of the discourse that occurred during the practice (Tracy, 1995). Labeling the strategies or "conversational moves" otherwise defined as a strategic action related to the purpose of the setting where a person intentionally sets up how he/she is expected to respond (K. Tracy, personal communication, January 31, 2012). I identified and labeled 10 conversational moves used by participants including echo and wordsmithing, both of which will be defined in chapter four. Once labeled, these were grouped by purpose. These categories included repair, reiterate, explain, share information and attempt consensus. A brief example of this can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8

Conversational Moves and Their Purpose

Conversational Move	Description	Example(s)	Purpose
Echo	Repeat same message using exact same or similar words	• Nope, No. Not thank you. • Okay. Yes, I can agree to it.	Reiterate
Wordsmithing	Intentional use of specific words	• "will" vs. "may" • We don't mean lazy, maybe reluctant to do the work • That is a definite possibility	Attempt consensus; share information; repair
Staging	Announce intent	• In my opinion, I'll say it • Can I ask what is… • Okay, let me ask this question	Share information
Circle Back	Bring up topic previously discussed and thought completed by one party	• Now back to reading • I had to come back to that • You have to come back to those concern	Reiterate

At this point of analysis while in compliance with the practice of AIDA, I diverted from the typical qualitative process of taking codes from categories to themes and performed no further traditional approaches to data analysis.

The next step in AIDA is the reconstruction of situated ideals. Using data primarily from follow-up interviews, analysis was used to reconstruct ideals situated in the participants' beliefs and expectations (Tracy, 1995). An example of this comes from an interview with an administrator, Taylor Windham. When asked about active parents, Taylor offered the following information:

> "…I think their educational level sometimes (influences their involvement), like I said, they feel a little intimidated or I don't know if they just feel trust for the process…I think we have some that they just feel like, oh that's their area of expertise. I'm just gonna, you know, trust in what they say or that she just doesn't have a problem. I think we have some that they just feel like, oh that's their area of expertise. I'm just gonna, you know, trust in what they say or that she just doesn't have a problem. Some of them kinda checked out, you know. We have parents that have different levels and some parents just show up. Some are very involved and some aren't so some we have never show up at ARDs.

These statements that were shared over the course of the interview indicate Taylor's situated ideal relative to parental involvement in ARD meetings. Tracy (2005) defines situated ideals as "participants' beliefs about good conduct that can be reconstructed from discursive moments in which they praise and criticize" (p. 314). In other words, situated ideals are not stated, defined, or overtly described by participants, but they are created based on a conglomeration of words,

phrases and inferences that are shared, including when things are said, who says them and whom or what they are said about.

Information gained through eight interviews of the six participants was rich with differences between participants' stated ideals and their actions as well as differences between standards for themselves and others. Tracy & Craig (2010) explain more about sources for creating ideal situations:

> In the contextual crevices – the spaces among what people actually do, how they evaluate their own and others' actions within the practice itself, in interviews, and in institutional documents – are to be found the raw materials for reconstructing a situated ideal. (p. 156).

One example involving Taylor Windham centers on the ideal of gaining input from the parent. In our interview Taylor stated, "…they're (parents) and an advocate for their child and I think that um>>> that they are a participating member with every bit as uh>>> say so… I do want to hear them be vocal and and RR get their input." However, during the ARD meeting Taylor solicited the parent's input only once and that was not self-initiated. While Taylor did check in with the parent fairly regularly to assess understanding, Taylor specifically asked for the parent's input only as a follow-up to a question from another ARD member that said, "Let's talk to mom and get her input." Similarly, implications made by what was not said also served as valuable data for constructing ideal situations. This echoes how AIDA informs the use of the interview as more than a simple source of participant-provided data about what may have happened at the event.

By using interviews for meta-analysis, in AIDA, the interview serves as the participants' forum to share their ideas and expectations about what they think should have happened versus

simply recreating the situation or answering the researcher's questions. This was apparent in the interviews conducted. One participant in particular, Ruby Williams, made numerous statements about what should be done, how administrators should act and what certain procedures should be and why. While Ruby was somewhat self-reflective during the interview, much of her dialogue revolved around how and why things could be better for her son as well as changes she has made herself. One example of this is Ruby's statement, "I've made plenty of mistakes but I learned from them whether it's to handle myself or whether when to speak or how to approach it or how to say what I need to say. I've learned all these years." Other parents also provided insight as they shared information such as Elaine's said in response to my question about why she did not ask questions about why there were two teachers at the ARD meeting instead of one:

> I was okay with it as well because I did agree and I was like okay, I want to hear what they have on both because last time they did one with a teacher and they were saying like well this teacher said this and well you know I want to hear her perspective and how she felt like -

Likewise, administrators also shared information during interviews that yielded their perspectives. On such statement was, "I think she trusts our district and trusts our school." Thus, participants' analysis of the ARD meeting during interviews was critical for my analysis with which I reconstructed situated ideals (as written in chapter 4) of collaboration based on the statements made during interviews:

- Like they kind of knocked it down to where I understood what they were talking about
- Basically I tell them what I want them to do, but this time like I said, I listened and let them tell me what was wrong and I thought the ideas like, you know, these are good examples

- She likes for me to understand what's going on
- Everything is there like I am set up to date with them and they're constantly there with me so we're good
- A good ARD is one where agreements are met by consensus
- I'm pretty sure we can work things out.
- We can come to an understanding. That's what I think. I mean maybe a lot of people don't think like that, but I figure we'll we talk it out and we come up to a conclusion

Although this is a brief group of statements from various participants, they characterize the mutual ideal of collaboration between parents and administrators.

The final step of the Action Implicative Discourse Analysis process, the *action* portion of AIDA, is to develop and propose ideas about how participants might engage in the practice in a more effective and reasonable manner as the result of personal reflection (Tracy, 2005). This proposal reflects the researcher's understanding of the issues that cause conflict, and concepts and strategies that can minimize the conflict. Through this inductive process, "…you are kind of immersing yourself in the data and then coming to claims that are guided by the general questions of 'What's the problem? How are they manifested discursively?'" (K. Tracy, personal communication, January 31, 2012). Because it requires deliberate judgment, this step was arduous. The difficulty was in the delicate task of providing recommendations that are based on the difference between the participant's ideals and actual practices. Participants also make judgments on how the meeting went and how it should have been conducted based on their ideals consistent with what Tracy (2005) points out, "…making this kind of judgment is just what participants do all the time" (p. 316). However, the difference is that participants' judgments in this context were sometimes automatic, self-determined and served their personal agendas,

whether consciously or subconsciously. Conversely, my determinations are based on an outsider perspective and intentionally proposed for others to act upon, and thus they may be viewed as judgmental or critical.

Because the schools selected for this study were those with a recent track record of success in addressing conflict at ARD meetings, the comparison of participants' ideals and actual events was expected to result in the development of guidelines that reflect and expand upon the successful strategies already being practiced. These proposals were made with the assumption that participants are willing to be reasonably reflective and realistically self-critical in order to improve their discourse skills and understanding of how the focal practice functions. Having situated myself as a neutral party, these recommendations did not include directives for implementation. Likewise I had no intention to impose any authority, determination, or judgment regarding the execution of these strategies following this study. These tactics are offered with the intention of increasing the successful communication at ARD meetings and making the practice even more efficient and beneficial for all participants. Evidence of these improvements can be noted through enhanced relationships between schools and parents, a reduction in the frequency and duration of conflicts at ARD meetings, a reduction in the number of ARD meetings ending in disagreement, reduced litigation, and an increase in collaboration between all ARD Committee members.

As an example, Elaine communicated in her interview that parental participation was important at the ARD meeting as she stated, "I'm there because I want to be there for my son to know you know. I want to be what- what RR yall are talking about my son, what your conflicts are anything about my son, I mean I'll do anything for my kids." However, her actions in the ARD meeting were different from this ideal because she spoke the least as evidenced by only 7

pages of transcript generated that included her discourse in ARD meetings compared to the other participants who generated 20 to 30 pages. Therefore, in many instances it remained unclear during the ARD meeting whether conflict manifested through discourse and was effectively resolved or whether Elaine chose to not act according to her ideal. Thus, two recommendations were made to Elaine in order to increase her participation. One was to use restatement when school staff shared something she did not understand, so as to minimize any misinterpretation. As Elaine shared a concern about a limited ability to be tactful and not defensive or angry when asking questions, another strategy recommended was to write her questions down as the meeting progressed and then if they were not answered during the meeting, ask them of the group. While the second strategy did not necessarily directly recommend more discourse during the ARD meeting, it did provide a way for Elaine to become more involved in the meeting without demanding that she discard her natural tendency to keep quiet. In other words, instead of being involved in the ARD meeting via "watch and see" it was suggested that Elaine could achieve her ideal of parental involvement by being involved through "write and ask."

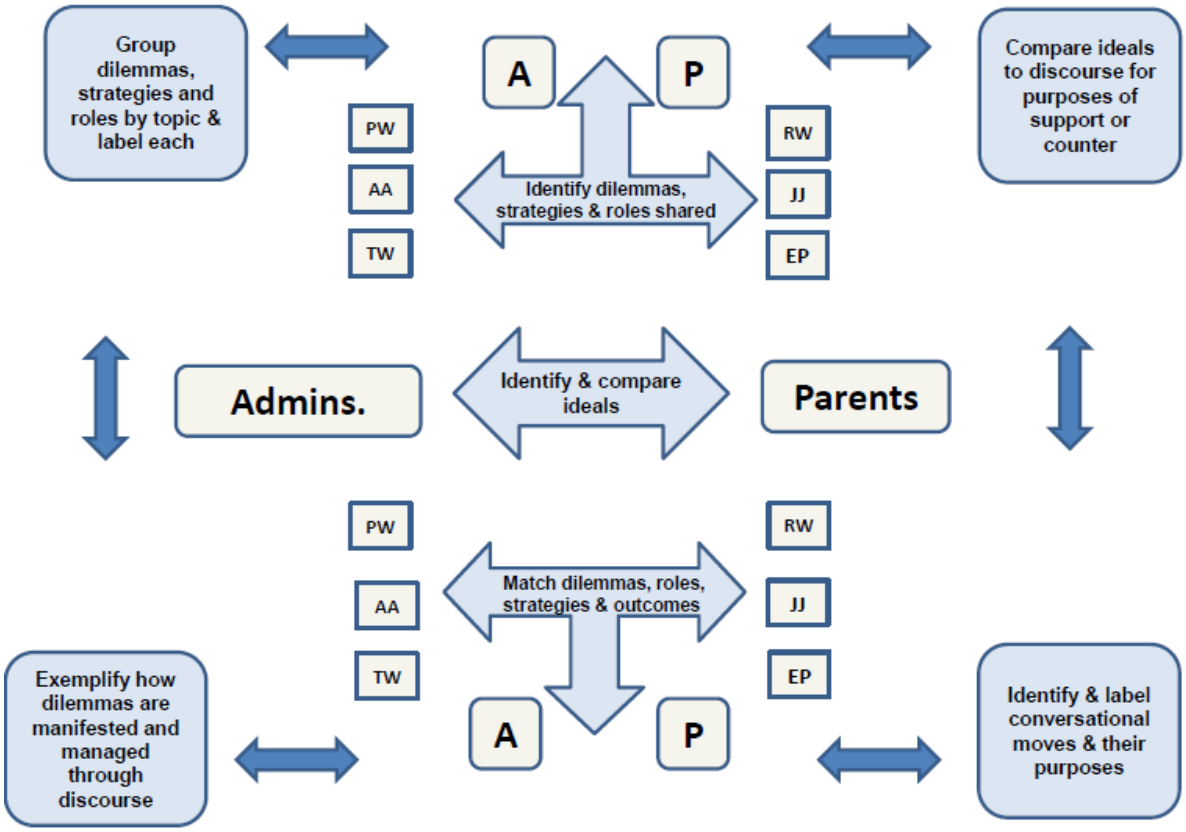


Figure 5: Phases of Analysis
Note: Small boxes contain initials of parent and administrator participants respectively. Capital "A" represents administrators as a group and capitol "P" represents parents as a group indicating that analysis occurred between groups and among participants in each group. Double-ended arrows indicate that analysis was a circular process and integrated data from all phases.

Figure 5 illustrates the process used for data analysis. As a non-linear process, data analysis involved many different phases. Referencing the middle of Figure 5 I first identified and compared ideals between groups. Next, I identified those dilemmas, strategies and roles that were mutual for each group and shared among participants within each group. I then matched dilemmas, roles and strategies for each group and among the participants of each group. For the next phase of analysis I grouped that data by topic and labeled the dilemmas, strategies and roles. Moving clockwise through Figure 5, I recorded how dilemmas were manifested and managed

through discourse for each participant. Next, I identified and labeled conversational moves used by individual participants and labeled each one. The next step of analysis compared the ideals shared by each participant to their discourse in order to determine if their discourse supported or countered their ideals. After completing all phases of data analysis, I made representational decisions based on the application of the tenets of GPT that are described in the next section.

Data Representation

This study is conceptually informed by GPT while the analytical procedures were implemented by guidelines recommended by AIDA. Based on the outcome of the data analysis steps as stated by AIDA, representational decisions were made by working the concepts of GPT through the analytic steps. While there is no prescriptive guideline for what representation should look like in a study incorporating GPT and AIDA, the decisions made for representation closely match the intersected tenets of both frameworks. Thus, given that there was a discernible difference between participants' ideals and actions, I created a section highlighting mutual ideals regarding ARD meetings. These mutual ideals were reflections from interviews shared after the ARD meeting. Additionally, due to the difference in actions and ideals, I highlighted the various ways in which the participants perceive their roles in the ARD meeting. These two forms of representation allowed me to compare how the ideals and the perceived roles intersected with similarities and differences to explain the dilemmas created as a result.

Next, I worked with all the ways in which dilemmas were created and how the participants managed these dilemmas with various discursive strategies. These dilemmas were identified by comparing various sources of data, how the participants discussed their ideals, roles, and reconstructed their understanding of events in the meeting. Thus, when discussing these dilemmas, it was important to highlight not only the perception of the dilemmas but also the resulting outcome. Given that GPT calls for offering conceptual recommendations and

AIDA suggests pairing such recommendations with actionable strategies, in the last section of chapter four I provide concepts to minimize conflicts and align them with various discursive strategies. These recommendations are made only as suggestions so that the participants would minimize the distance between their ideals and actions. This is demonstrated in Figure 6 below:

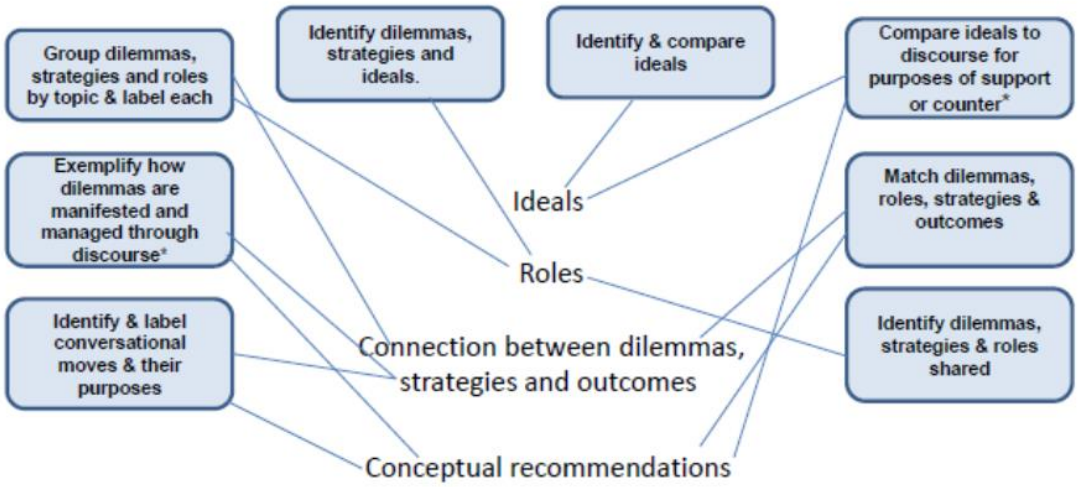


Figure 6: Analysis Contributions
Note: Illustration of how results from each phase of analysis contributed to data representation.

It was my intention to not present the findings as a prescriptive list of dilemma-prevention tips or techniques. Applying the lens of practical application, and in an effort to avoid any polarity regarding blame for dilemmas or responsibility for improvements, the conceptual ideals were intentionally tied to the ARD meeting as an event as discursive actions and concepts that *should* be considered and applied if participants want to improve the practice of ARD meetings.

I specifically did not provide narratives for each ARD because there was a possibility that a full narrative of each ARD would just look like a long argument between multiple characters.

Additionally presenting each ARD as its own narrative would have appeared to be a data dumping exercise instead of synthesis of data. Therefore, I synthesized key patterns from each meeting, triangulated the patterns with interviews and other data sources, and then grouped them in similar semantic units for representational purposes.

In deciding how to discuss deep analytical understanding of the findings, I struggled with choosing a single representation. As a visual learner, my intention was to create a graphic representation of the findings. However, my attempts to produce graphic representations quickly became too numerous and complicated. To constantly communicate information in ways that listeners and readers can easily understand, I instinctively think in metaphors. I recalled that Gee (2011) likened discourse to a dance, something I explained in chapter two that began to resonate strongly. Recall, the specific quote states:

> A Discourse is a "dance" that exists in the abstract as a coordinated pattern of words, deeds, values, beliefs, symbols, tools, objects, times and places and in the here and now as a performance that is recognizable…a performance that is never exactly the same. It all comes down, often, to what the "masters of the dance" (the people who inhabit the Discourse) will allow to be recognized, or will be forced to recognize as a possible instantiation of the dance (Gee, 2011, p. 36).

Inspired by Gee's metaphoric use of dance in conceptualizing discourse, I extended my understanding of the findings through the metaphor of Argentine tango. I journaled and reflected deeply about this metaphor to ensure that this conceptualization was not superficial and represented the depth of understanding and analysis. I reflected on how the dilemmas and the negotiation of the dilemmas in ARD meetings were similar to an intertwined dance full of

tension yet requiring movement and working collaboratively. Thus in the final discussion section in chapter four, I use Argentine Tango for deeper understanding of the findings.

Finally I contemplated about the difference between traditional discourse analysis approaches and the work done using GPT as a conceptual framework with AIDA as a methodological guide. In a traditional discourse analysis approach I would have focused solely on the analysis of discourse by emphasizing interruptions, overlapping speech, repairs, counts, how certain words were used, transcription markings, etc. However in this study, I used transcription markings to denote those issues, but given that I was theoretically grounded in GPT, I expanded that analysis to concepts, which is what is called for in GPT. Thus I invite the reader to read the findings chapter with a shifted lens from traditional discourse analysis to an implicative one. Implicative discourse analysis requires that I point towards the concepts implicated by the data analysis and expand on the implications of the concepts.

The representation in chapter four also reflects analysis conducted on dilemmatic moments. Using AIDA implies that the researcher only transcribes dilemmatic moments for analysis. Thus, while I had tons of raw data, if the data did not center around tension/disagreement, it was not appropriate to use for the study. The administrators in this study were relatively proficient in handling conflict during ARD meetings, so dilemmatic moments were few. Thus some of the moments are repeated in chapter four for examining those moments through different contexts to create a comprehensive understanding and to imply that discursive dilemmatic moments are not moments that can tied down to one linear meaning, one linear application, restricted to one use. Conflicts represent the ways in which participants connect to several discursive positions and the way they make meaning of the tensions in those

positions. Therefore, I selected some rich dilemmatic moments to present it at various points in the representation for multiple ways of looking at the same discursive element.

Ethical Considerations

Due to my professional role as a Director of Special Education in a local public school district, there was potential risk that participants would not be forthcoming with information. Also, recognizing the authority of my professional position, information shared with me may be exaggerated to make a point or limited so as not to expose errors. Additionally, participants could have shared information privately that, if exposed, may have compromised both current relationships between participants and services being considered for the student. Given my leadership position I was extremely mindful about my verbal and non-verbal communication that might indicate support or disagreement with the participant's position.

The content of ARD meetings is highly confidential thus it was paramount that data not be disclosed or discussed with anyone other than the respective, voluntary participants. My dissertation chairperson also had access to this data, but only on an as-needed basis and through procedures that ensure confidentiality.

Early in my study I encountered an ethical crossroad. When I contacted Jessica Johnson about an upcoming ARD meeting for Jeremiah, she explained that she did not have transportation to get to the meeting. Perhaps my friendly behavior made Jessica comfortable in seeing me as both a friend and a researcher. However, I was unsure of the ethical implications of providing a ride to Jessica and walking into the ARD meeting with her. Upon further reflection, I decided that the purpose of this study was to focus on how parents deal with dilemmas at the ARD meeting. If I had means to transfer a parent to a meeting and chose not to, I would have to accept that I was partially responsible for Jessica's absence at the meeting. I was uncomfortable with this assumed responsibility that I felt towards Jessica's presence at the

meeting. As a professional, I also felt a commitment towards providing a parent a way to participate more actively in her child's education. Thus, I decided to offer Jessica a ride to the meeting. During the 15-minute car ride, I intentionally kept the conversation focused on mundane topics that did not emphasize her child's special education needs. These mundane topics included the weather, her travels to Texas, and her pets.

Another ethical consideration included the fact that I had previously worked with two of the administrators, Adrian Archer and Pat Wheeler. Adrian Archer and I had both been previously employed by the same school district where I was the Director of Special Education. In that setting, we did not work directly together, but our paths crossed at district-wide assemblies and when I was on the campus where Adrian was a coach and teacher. As a result, such contact had minimal effect on our relationship as researcher and participant. While our prior relationship did not contribute to tension, it did create an opportunity for us to work together directly for the first time. Pat Wheeler and I had worked together directly as administrators in the same district in the recent past. In my capacity as the Director of Special Education, I had collaborated with Pat about litigious situations and attended some ARD meetings where Pat served as the administrator. With no pressure to impress each other with our knowledge our past relationship as co-workers allowed us to be open and honest in the roles of researcher and participant.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Maintaining transparency concerning data collection and data analysis throughout the study was important for establishing trustworthiness and rigor. In order to provide clarity and mitigate ambiguity, various efforts were implemented. Strategies included ongoing and extensive review of the data via repeated member checks, peer debriefing, bracketing, triangulation, and the use of multiple data sources. Also, as non-negotiable elements of the

theoretical framework and the methodology, reflective journaling and analytic memos provided continuing opportunities for introspection and contemplation. Prolonged duration in the field provided a sense of immersion which allowed me to more readily absorb contextual information and gain insightful views. Following is brief review of each of these strategies:

Member Checks

Considering my subjectivities and tendency to "get lost" in the data, confirming that my understanding was a shared understanding with the participants' ways of making meaning was imperative. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that member checks contribute to the credibility of the data as participants are given the opportunity to both corroborate data and respond to outcomes of the research. Member checks involved working with participants to confirm that information shared by them was accurate, to ask clarifying questions, to allow participants the opportunity to expand upon information and to ensure that outcomes were appropriate representations of their input. One example involved my member check session with Taylor Windham where I identified my interpretation of ideals about ARD meetings, dilemmas identified as well as the role in ARD meetings for Taylor. During the member check session, Taylor responded to my interpretations by saying, "Exactly" and "Right." Taylor also took advantage of the opportunity to expand on the input by comparing ARD experiences as a teacher to those as an administrator in another district. As a result I was able to better understand how such experiences have contributed to why Taylor values parental involvement in ARD meetings. Comments from other participants during member checks included "Yes, that is very accurate" and "I think that is a good reflection…" These results indicated that the participants agreed with my summations and interpretations. Member checks also provided affirmation for participants as most of them seemed proud of the message they conveyed to me. This activity also empowered the participants by authenticating their contributions.

Peer Debriefing

Consultation with colleagues who have experience in the fields of special education and/or discourse analysis served to demonstrate trustworthiness throughout this study. By obtaining the perspective of persons who had knowledge of the practice yet had no vested interest in the research, I was able to gain what Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as the "devil's advocate" perspective by encouraging questions related to "substantive, methodological, legal, ethical or any other relevant matters" (p. 308). Through peer debriefing, I discovered that the initial findings were somewhat superficial and included information that could have been considered "common sense". Consequently, I became aware of the depth of analysis that I needed to achieve. I also found that peer debriefing allowed me to be more reflective based on questions they posed or comments they made on various aspects of the study. Peer debriefing conversations were recorded and transcribed.

Bracketing

By writing down personal presumptions or professional expectations about events that take place throughout the study, I acknowledged my subjectivities and addressed them to become aware of their roles in this study. Creswell (2007) defines bracketing as the setting aside of personal values, opinions and assumptions. Personal values, opinions, and assumptions could also inform my hunches, feelings, questions and distracting thoughts. I do not claim to set aside these subjectivities while conducting the study, because that would mean that I would have to claim that I was value neutral during this study, which would be intellectually inaccurate. Instead, as a bracketing exercise, I became hyper vigilant of all my subjectivities that arose to the surface and reflected closely on them and how they shaped my understanding of this study at various stages.

For example, I struggled with my dual role as a researcher and a professional in special education so much that I had to write "**RESEARCHER**" in bold, capital letters on the top of every page on which I took notes. I even contemplated making myself a bracelet with a large "R" bead to remind me to eliminate judgmental determinations about content or procedures at ARD meetings and focus on being the researcher. An example of bracketing is included in Figure 7 below:

I just finished watching a videotape of an ARD and I am very uncomfortable with two things: (1) one teacher referred to her classroom (a structured setting for students that struggle with behavior) as "my unit." This has a negative, medical hospital connotation to it and I believe that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of negativity and bad behavior. (2) There was a lot of talking today, 99% of which was the school staff. Everyone reported something to mom …to me it felt like a reverse press conference. Do they like to hear themselves talk? Do they think that the more they talk the more they have to contribute? Do they have no self-regulation? Why didn't the admin. step in to better control the information sharing frenzy? I know my tendency is to defend the helpless and advocate on behalf of the underdog, so, just like I am expecting from others, I need to regulate my judgment.

Figure 7. Example of Bracketing.

Another example included my "support and focus" notes that I wrote on my observation notes to remind myself not to become invested in the content or procedures of the meeting but to support the participants by focusing on their dialogue. Bracketing occurred via journaling and

analytic memos throughout the study, but most specifically immediately prior to and during ARD meetings. Based on the direct connection between the topic of this study and my profession, bracketing was vital for me to be able to focus on the data via my researcher lens more so than my practitioner lens.

Multiple Data Sources

The use of numerous and varied sources of information was a strategy that I used to support the rigor of this study. Saldana (2011) discusses that the use of multiple sources allows for "a spectrum of diverse perspectives…and dimension" to be added to the researcher's understanding (p. 76). I collected 455 pages of data detailed in Table 4 through sources of data that included observations, in-depth interviews, informal conversations, participant observations, field notes, videotapes, researcher journal entries and analytic memos.

Triangulation

Cross referencing multiple and various data sources for consistency of information was paramount in demonstrating internal consistency. The convergence of evidence from multiple sources was used to accomplish data triangulation (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The use of numerous data sources revealed different perspectives of an issue, and thus expanded my knowledge and promoted quality within the study (Denzin & Giardina, 2011). Lichtman (2010) discussed that while one perspective leads to one interpretation, if multiple perspectives result in the same interpretation, then it could be considered more legitimate. For this study, all data sources mentioned above were compared for consistency between them.

Journaling and Analytic Memos

Saldana (2011) explains an analytic memo is as "a narrative that sets in words your interpretation of the data" (p. 98). My analytical memoing included both intentional and spontaneous interpretive results of data analysis, introspective questions and answers about the

data as well as "note to self" about analysis results. Examples of analytic memos include phrases and questions such as, "Did Johnson ask questions just because I was there?", "How can I get them to care?" and "Parent/admin. sitting on same side of table – visually seems like a team, but may impede communication – too direct…too close together." As it is fundamentally unfeasible to withhold or remove one's perceptual effect from the data and processes involved in research, I maintained a journal throughout the study which included text and graphics as a result of my attempts to visualize concepts. Because I dedicated myself to journaling thoughts as they occurred, my journal took many forms including post-it notes, napkins, program bulletins and even the back of receipts. Journaling about my thoughts, ideas, questions, opinions and presumptions throughout the study served as a type of internal analysis as well as a venting source. Figure 8 includes examples of two separate entries from my journal:

- ~~Maybe~~ Obviously I was just way off – presumptuous (based on my experience) in that the discourse re: conflict mostly occurs between admin & parent – I am discovering that it has occurred between parent & whomever seems to have authority/answers (according to parent)…sets up an "I" versus "them" scenario – confirmed by JJ interview, Williams interview and Palmer interview.
- Line 236 Archer interview – What? Obviously not "knowledgeable" of purpose of ARD; significance; importance; WAY TOO much valuing "fair." Goes against all that I work

I also utilized my journal to maintain a record of chronological events, the log the development of research and my own reactions to, feelings about, and opinions of the data as well as the research process itself. Both journaling and analytic memos functioned as conduits of my thought process and provided insight and transparency throughout the course of the study.

Prolonged Duration in the Field

Although qualitative research practices do not mandate a specific amount of time in the field, extended time in the field is beneficial and indispensable in gaining insight that comes only as a result of direct, interactive experiences. As otherwise explained by Freeman, DeMarrias, Preissle, Roulston, and St. Pierre (2007), "…the relational aspects of qualitative work are so important, scholars value extended time in the field" (p. 26). For this study, I was in the field for 5 months. This extended time in the field afforded me multiple advantages that included the opportunity to become immersed in the data, to build relationships with participants, to obtain copious observation data, to perform multiple in-depth interviews and have personal experiences that allowed me to better understand the experiences of the participants (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Another positive by-product was that due to my extended time in the field, I became increasingly familiar with campus staff and was welcomed on the campuses when I arrived as opposed to being unknown and questioned as if I were just a random, sporadic observer.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I reviewed the rationale and research design for this study. I discussed Grounded Practical Theory (GPT) as the conceptual framework and Action-Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA) as the methodology. I explained the process used in determining the research site and the selection of participants. I described the data collection methods, data management and data analysis procedures with examples where appropriate. I also provided rationale for representational decisions and disclosed ethical issues that arose during the study. Finally, I delineated my efforts to support the trustworthiness and rigor of this study. The findings of the study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter I identify the findings of this study that focused on three parents of children with special needs and three campus administrators serving on Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meetings in a South Texas school district. The three questions that guided this study are:

1. How do campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities describe their respective dilemmas during their participation in ARD meetings?
2. What interactional strategies are utilized by campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities when handling dilemmas at ARD meetings?
3. What expectations do campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities have about their roles in ARD meetings?

The conversation data from 10 interviews, the dilemmatic moments of five ARD meetings, and member checks with participants were transcribed and analyzed. Please note that to avoid massive discursive data dumping that occurred during the exchanges in ARD meetings, the findings are conceptually grouped according to the tenets of GPT and AIDA. Where possible I offer direct excerpts from the ARD meetings or interviews. However, when an exchange is long and an excerpt would appear abrupt with contextual information missing, I offer a synthesis level discursive summary. Keeping this strategy in mind, I first uncover participants' mutual ideals regarding ARD meetings. The presentation of these ideals is to offer the reader a contextual and conceptual overview of the ARD meeting and the consequent relationships between the parents and the administrators. Then I present what participants perceived their roles to be in the ARD meetings and explain how these roles intersect with their ideals. Next, dilemmas that participants encountered during ARD meetings and how these dilemmas were managed through

discourse are presented. Findings of discursive negotiations are presented from the perspectives of the parents and the administrators. An in-depth analysis of dilemmas, discursive strategies and outcomes of the dilemmas are presented in the next section. Finally, I label ideals of ARD meetings conceptually and provide action-based, discursive strategies for parents and administrators to consider utilizing in order to achieve those ideals.

AIDA: Ideals of Participants

Not surprisingly, parents and administrators did not have identical ideals for ARD meetings, but they did have many in common. Both parents and administrators valued having their questions answered. The majority of questions asked during ARD meetings were intended to be answered by school staff, whether the question was asked by the parent or the administrator. While most of the questions that administrators asked revolved around accountability, the bulk of the questions asked by parents were requests for information.

At times, administrators would request information from school staff, disagree with staff and/or direct staff to do something different than that person had planned. By doing this, parents saw the administrator as their advocate, a positive position that seemed to place the administrator and parent on the same team. All parent participants implied a perspective of "them (the school) vs. us (the parents)" on one or more occasions. One parent in particular referenced this stance repeatedly by using the term "them" more than 25 times to define the school staff in an oppositional context through her one-hour interview. However, when the administrators supported and advocated for the parents, the parents did not see a divide between them and the administrator. The binary relationship of *Us versus Them* shifted for the parents, so that they perceived the administrators and themselves on one team and everyone else at the meeting on another team.

Additionally, administrators wanted to be sure that all questions were answered, whether the questions were theirs or the parents'. In most circumstances where an answer was not provided, the response from the administrator involved creating a plan to get an answer to that question. For example, one parent was satisfied with informational responses while another required both information and accountability in order to be satisfied. In some situations asking a question proved to be the only way the mother could become involved in the conversation and when that action initiated a discussion or a response from others, her input became legitimized. Another parent, Jessica Johnson, explained that one of the reasons she went to ARD meetings was to find out what was going on. Although her approach did not seem to include an intention to hold others accountable, she placed so much value on learning what was happening in regard to her child's education that it somewhat defined part of her perceived role in the ARD meeting.

As expressed in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), parents have the right to "…participate in meetings with respect to the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of the child and the provision of FAPE (free and appropriate public education) to the child" (34 CFR 500. 501 (b) (1)). Hence, Jessica's reasons for asking questions seemed to align with the intention of the law regarding parent participation. When their questions were answered to their satisfaction, parents seemed to be empowered and to view themselves as an active, contributing member of the meeting. Thus parents valued having questions answered for the purpose of gaining information and status. Likewise, data from this study indicated that asking questions of ARD committee members seemed to be the primary method through which parents participated in ARD meetings.

Related to getting their questions answered, both parents and administrators considered being prepared a key component of a successful ARD meeting. One administrator, Adrian

Archer, mentioned the importance of being prepared so that there was no time wasted during the ARD meeting. With the goals of efficiency, progress and task accomplishment, an ideal ARD meeting, according to Adrian, involved having and knowing enough information to answer all questions that could possibly be asked. Moreover, placing value on the ARD meeting beginning on time, Adrian interrupted casual conversation between the parent and other school staff to ask a teacher, "Ms. Pitt, where are the others?" followed a few sentences later by, "Do you want me to get them?" This type of questioning expressed impatience with conversation not related to the purpose of the meeting and the importance that Adrian placed on being prepared. This action also reiterated the role of the administrator as someone who valued everyone's time investment in the meeting and wanted to use time wisely for the purpose of the meeting.

From the parents' perspective, preparedness meant that more than one person could answer their questions and that relevant paperwork was provided to them as requested in advance so that the parents could come to the meeting prepared themselves. One example involved Ruby Williams not being provided requested paperwork in what she considered to be a timely manner before the ARD meeting. At the meeting the school staff explained that the paperwork had not been available when she requested it due to the extended, medically-based absence of the teacher responsible for mailing the documents to her. As a part of their explanation, the school staff also reminded Ruby that she knew about the teacher's medical issues, to which Ruby responded with a reiteration of her expectation, cancelled the meeting, and walked out of the room. During the discussion of this incident, Ruby explained,

> And if somebody's not here then somebody needs to pick up the ball and say, 'You know what, I'm taking it, I'm rolling with it, I'm gonna get it done.' Just because somebody's

> not here. You know they're not here. Administration needs to know, okay, who's gonna take care of it now?

This indicated that Ruby expected school staff to be prepared as a group, to be ready to fulfill the obligations of the school, no matter which person did so. Ruby expected the administrator to be accountable for coordinating such teamwork. Before the next scheduled ARD meeting Ruby was provided the documents she requested. Then she considered herself prepared and no conflict arose regarding this issue. When asked what could be done by the administrator to reduce conflict, Ruby responded,

> And all I ask is that they mail me the IEPs so that I can be prepared just like I was today. I was a happy camper. Why? Because I'm prepared. I don't want to come in here and I have to sit here four hours because I have to read the IEPs. I should be able to come in the way I did – prepared.

Thus, this mother's reasoning for wanting the documents before the ARD meeting was not only self-serving but also an effort to be considerate of others' time by not having to prolong the meeting unnecessarily. Ruby's use of the word *prepared* indicated the value she placed on being equipped with information. While her direct reasoning was to save time, the implication was that she wanted to be armed with information that enabled her to ask questions and hold others accountable. In other words, according to Ruby, the school could help themselves by facilitating the parents' preparedness.

In a similar situation, Jeremiah's mother, Jessica Johnson, requested information during the ARD meeting. The school staff were unable to provide it because, as they explained, the only person who could answer the mother's question was not present at the meeting. In contrast to Ruby Williams' response, Jessica accepted the school's explanation. However, when

reflecting on her participation, Jessica used the phrase, “I don’t know” 18 times. Once she stated, “So I don't know. I got to talk to that lady, though, because I needed to know why did they tell me he has enough credits, you know?” At another time Jessica mentioned, “But I don't know what's going to happen on the next meeting,” and yet another time she said, “I don't know. Whoever the person is that was in there, you know, she's the only one that knows.” Thus, although Jessica may have accepted explanations, received answers to her questions, and agreed with recommendations during the ARD meeting, she did not consider herself to be fully informed. As a result, she was limited in her ability to be prepared enough to meaningfully participate in the ARD meeting.

Another ideal shared among parents and administrators included accountability. As previously mentioned, one way that accountability was assessed was through questions and answers. A different way that parents and administrators demonstrated accountability was by getting tasks accomplished. For administrators, accountability included responding to parent requests, gaining consensus and completing each portion of the meeting. In contrast, parents defined accountability as being provided with information or being assured of services and actions. Some administrators mentioned that in each ARD meeting they had a checklist of items to address in order to be legally compliant. In other words, it seemed that there was a strong perception that the purpose of the ARD meetings was to be legally compliant instead of collaboratively exploring the best interest of the student. All administrators either stated or inferred that the items on the agenda in the ARD meeting were based on the software program used to house and manage the meeting documents. This meant that a natural free-flowing conversation was prohibited and a conversation driven by items on the software-generated

agenda took place. Thus, the software became a measure of accountability for the administrator and the district by ensuring that all legal compliance items were addressed in the ARD meeting.

More than one administrator considered it part of their accountability if they were able to complete an ARD meeting and have signatures on the relevant documents. This was indeed a task that needed to be done, and when done it could be checked off an administrator's list of things to do. Accountability was achieved once all members had signed in agreement at the end of the meeting and no one stormed out during the meeting. However, one ARD meeting was not completed due to the mother walking out of the meeting before it was completed. When asked about the situation, the administrator of that ARD meeting, Pat Wheeler, claimed responsibility for not being able to get the parent to stay at the meeting longer.

An added example of accountability demonstrated by administrators included attempts to hold parents responsible. The following exchange between Pat Wheeler, an administrator, and Ruby Williams, a parent, provides an example:

> PAT: Uh-huh ((affirmative)) but have we-have y'all contacted MHID?
>
> RUBY: MHID? No, but with Dr. Ramsey, he's his MHID doctor here, but he sees him in Central City and he says the same thing. Okay, we're gonna try to get him something but it's gonna have to be something very, very simple.
>
> PAT: (directed at a school staff member at the meeting): And we have provided the contact information for MHID?
>
> PAT: Because there will be skills that they'll work on, there'll be services that they'll work on, uh, that they can provide that will help with this transition and like you said, you always hope for the best.
>
> RUBY: Yeah.

PAT: And work for the best and that's what they will do, okay? A- and that'll be part of his transition plan.

In this example, Pat Wheeler engaged the mother in a conversation about a state-funded program of services for students with disabilities for after-school activities. The acronym is fictionalized in order to protect the possible identification of the student, parent, or the administrator. While Pat was not overtly authoritative, Pat's questioning, turn taking, and repeating information were moves made to hold the parent accountable while contextualizing such moves as being in the interest of the student's educational needs. In the end, Pat was able to come to a place of shared understanding with the parent of what needed to be done next while holding the parent accountable for her role in the next set of actions.

Holding a parent accountable is exemplified in the following exchange between Adrian Archer, an administrator and Jessica Johnson, a parent:

ADRIAN: Do you by chance have any records from when you guys moved from New City? And, um, he was going to Arcadia, uh, Special Services in New City, is that right?

JESSICA: Yeah.

ADRIAN: When you left from that school district and moved to Texas did you bring his, uh, school records with you?

JESSICA: Uh, they have them all over there in Warner.

ADRIAN: Warner, okay?

JESSICA: Yeah I-

ADRIAN: Okay so everything Warner received-

JESSICA: They have a big book about like that (gestures regarding size of book).

ADRIAN: Okay, and they still have that? You didn't take that with you when you went to Echo ISD?

JESSICA: No.

ADRIAN: No, okay so we'll contact them and see if they still have – it was a binder, a folder, what, what?

JESSICA: Noooo, it was a big book of all his, uh, they send it from over there from, uh, Pennsylvania.

ADRIAN: Okay, Okay okay, we'll make a call and maybe in that paperwork we'll find some of the credits that we were discussing this morning that Jeremiah has.

While there was no direct mention of fault in either of these interactions, parental accountability was brought into the spotlight. Given that the full exchange was lengthy and representing the exchange would appear more as a data dump than synthesis, it is sufficient to say that throughout the meeting there was a sporadic volleying of culpability, which demonstrated the value both parents and administrators place on holding each other accountable. However, the administrator's line of questioning implies that the parent had some role in informing the school about her son's prior records. While this posturing by the administrator was not to shame the parent, it was to remind the parent of her role and hold her accountable to that role.

Furthermore, while parents and administrators valued accountability it seemed to be sought and accomplished in different ways. Parents requested actions, items or information in order to achieve accountability. Their requests were literal and could be easily responded to through the provision of written information or actions agreed to at the meeting. For example, when Jessica Johnson asked an unfamiliar person at the meeting table, "And what department do you fit in?" she received an introduction to that person and an explanation of why she was there,

as well as what that person's responsibilities were. As a result, Jessica perceived that she had held that person accountable for being at the meeting. Also, because Jessica was satisfied with the answers, she accepted that person as a member of the ARD meeting. Ruby Williams, on the other hand, held school staff accountable when she inferred that they had faltered regarding confidentiality when she found IEPs in the locker room. What began as an implied request quickly morphed into an uncomfortable conversation where Ruby tried to hold the school accountable for what she thought was her right.

> RUBY: The other thing is that, I requested IEPs to be mailed, and I've only gotten IEPs twice, the ones that she mailed and I think one more throughout the whole year.
>
> PAT: So you didn't get IEPS mailed home each six weeks?
>
> RUBY: I'm gonna tell you what! The IEPS were in the locker room!
>
> PAT: So really what we have to do with them is mail them home every time.
>
> RUBY: Mail them!

These exchanges were the beginning of 53 lines of discourse on this topic where Ruby had eight incidences of overlapping speech, Pat had none. Pat had 16 repetitions and Ruby did not repeat anything. Ruby tried to repair her sentences at least once and Pat did the same four times. Ruby interrupted others at least four times and Pat only once. Ruby also used vocal fillers where she extended her voice or words to take more time four times and Pat did the same thrice. The conversation ended with a compromised consensus that included agreeing to Ruby's position. For some parents, acknowledgement of the parent's request was adequate for the parent to see the school as being accountable to his or her child. In other cases, the parent required a mutually approved plan in order to perceive the school being held accountable for their responsibilities. In the vast majority of occurrences related to accountability, neither parents nor administrators

accepted anything less than acknowledgement of the request.

Another aspect of an ideal ARD meeting expressed by both parents and administrators involved explanation of information that may not be understood by parents. As in any dialogue, all parties must have a working knowledge of the content being discussed in order to contribute to the conversation. In situations where parents communicated or implied a lack of understanding, explanations were provided by administrators in multiple contexts, such as an extension of a request for parental agreement, as an effort to reiterate a point and as justification of a recommendation. These descriptions were provided either by utilizing common, non-educational jargon or through relevant examples. Both parents and administrators viewed such explanations as avenues for gaining parental involvement, a necessary ideal. Thus, when parents were able to understand the information provided to them, the details about the jargon, they were agreeable collaborators in the meeting as they reported that they understood what educational services were being recommended and the reasons behind the recommendations.

Administrators and parents agreed that clarifying and providing information reduced the perception that parents were being dominated in the conversation since parents participated more in the conversation when they understood the information presented before them. When parents did not participate in the conversation, it was mostly because they did not understand the information being presented or because they felt that their opinions were not of value to the administrators. However clarification as a way to mitigate the notion of dominating the parents held true whether such information was requested by parents or voluntarily provided. In many instances the administrator assessed parental understanding by using direct questions such as, “Do you understand what we are talking about?” or “Do you have any questions about that?” These deliberate insertions of questions were an invitation to the parents to engage in the

conversation, even if it was in the form of confusion. Thus, administrators could assess where might there be a communication gap and address the gap. Appreciating the administrator's needs for providing clarification before questions could arise, one mother explained that because the administrator provided spontaneous explanations, the questions she was planning were answered before she had to ask them aloud. In this case, the administrator's provision of explanations almost in anticipation of questions contributed to parents' feelings of being understood and valued.

Gaining and listening to input from parents were equally valued by both administrators and parents to assure accurate understanding. Taylor Windham, an administrator, directly expressed this perspective through the description of parents as "…an advocate for their child and I think that, um, that they are a participating member with every bit as, uh, say so as to what goes on if not more" and "…I do want to hear them be vocal and, and get their input." Such statements revealed the reasons why Taylor valued parental involvement. With an implication of respect for the parent's input, this ideal has the potential for creating a discourse where power is shared between the parent and the administrator when jargons are explained, questions are welcomed, and participation is valued.

However, not all administrators viewed participation the same way or idealized the same kind of participation. During our interview, Taylor communicated that parents who engaged in collaboration were fulfilling their duty of campaigning for their child. While specific discursive strategies for obtaining parental input will be discussed later in this chapter, it is noteworthy that Taylor intentionally solicited parental input. In contrast, another administrator, Adrian Archer, defined an actively involved parent as:

> …a parent who is knowledgeable about, um, schedules, courses, future educational plans, uh, life after completing a program, that transition plan, somebody who asks questions when they don't know what exactly the terminology may be or when, you know, there are conversations going on that she is not involved in…an active parent immediately would say, when the conversation is over, 'How does that pertain to my child?' or 'What should I know about this?'

In other words, while Adrian valued parental input enough to provide a definition and anticipate under what circumstances such input would be reasonable, the onus of becoming involved was directly placed on the parent. Although having parental input had been declared important, Adrian did not perceive it as the administrator's responsibility to facilitate parental participation.

Statements from another administrator, Pat Wheeler, communicated the value of parent input but also delineated a significant function of discourse between parents and administrators as opposed to any other discourse that may occur at an ARD meeting, as can be noted in the following excerpt:

> …an ARD is supposed to be a collaborative process, but there are two people that have a large, you know, that have a higher status within the ARD and that is the parent and the administrator or the parent and the administrator diag. (diagnostician) together. And so those conversations become key to, uh, moving an ARD forward and also preventing a misinterpretation of what the ARD decision is.

In other words, according to Pat, the most critical relationship in the ARD meeting is that between the parent and the administrator, which drives the entire meeting. The discursive relationship between these two stakeholders is vital to collaboration, forward progress, and mutual understanding. To establish the criticality of this partnership, Pat offered another

example where conflicting issues were first raised, and discussed, before shaping the outcome of the meeting with the parent's input:

> …once we got all the issues on the table and then we said, 'Here's, here's a skeleton for a plan and the parent started putting their input into that plan, I knew that we had reached a point where we're gonna to work together.

These statements were made because Pat explained that there were misunderstandings between the school's representatives and the parent. Until those issues were discussed, a parent could not collaborate in the decision-making process fully or effectively in partnership with the administrators. Thus, Pat worked to ensure that both parents and school staff took the time and opportunity to share their concerns and listen to each other before recommending action. After those concerns were known and acknowledged without judgment or blame, Pat initiated a discussion about a suggested plan of action and asked the mother to work in partnership to revise the plan. Once the parent participated in this planning process, the collaborative work had begun. By creating the opportunity for this cooperation, Pat demonstrated that the parent's contribution was worthy and valued. This interaction occurred through an exchange where there were 95 turn takings, 17 overlapping conversations while speaker changes were occurring, 10 events of rephrasing information, 13 events of repeating information, and 17 restarts of the same idea.

Parents assigned significant value to having the opportunity to provide their input and be heard. In the following exchange, Ruby Williams communicated that being listened to was not something that occurred at every ARD meeting:

> AMY: Did you feel like you were heard and listened to?
>
> RUBY: Today I was.

AMY: Today?

RUBY: Today.

AMY: By everyone?

RUBY: Yes and I wasn't talked down to.

AMY: Okay, tell me more about that.

RUBY: Well wh- why have me here? Just to sign a piece of paper? It ain't gonna happen anymore.

Ruby did not provide an example of being talked down to, an avoidance technique she utilized frequently in the meeting and with me. However, her objection to being seen as someone there to just sign papers for compliance purposes stemmed from not being seen as a person who needed to be listened to and whose ideas had value.

Jessica Johnson also did not want to be dismissed or valued poorly, though she was less vocal about her objections than Ruby Williams. However, she expressed her disappointment in different statements such as, "Well, I'm over-voted," "I can give them my opinion, but I'm going to be over-voted. One against all them" and, "because they're the ones- they're the administrator, the teachers, the people who make the decision. I don't make the decision, they make it. They make the decision. So by them making that decision I have no say-so." Jessica did not perceive that she had value with the administrators or that she had any power to convince the administrators to find value in her ideas about her child's education. This perception of being powerless highlights the importance of parents being valued as active, contributing members of the ARD meeting. Although she later asked questions and shared her opposing opinions, Jessica accepted the final decisions of the ARD committee without argument. Her acceptance of the school's decision could be interpreted as trust, or reluctant compliance, or lacking information to

present a strong enough argument to sway the ARD committee to agree with her ideas. However, such reluctant compliance indicated that either the school's representatives did not sense Jessica's reluctance or if they did, saw no reason to address the situation. Jessica represents the type of parent who, while being concerned about her child's education, does not have a working knowledge of the ARD process, special education laws, or her rights in the ARD meeting.

Yet, considering the example of the actively involved vocal parent and the parent who wants to be involved but lacks information and agency, it becomes apparent that no matter where the parents situate themselves, they want to be heard and valued. They want to be part of the process of determining what is in the best interest of their child's educational needs. While the administrators valued parental participation, the ways in which they conceptualized participation varied. Thus, while both groups valued input and participation, because they made sense of these ideals differently, there were reasons for conflict to arise in ARD meetings. Where the parents and the administrators valued ideals similarly, conflicts were minimized.

In addition to being heard and valued, administrators and parents emphasized the importance of collaboration to reach consensus at ARD meetings. Pat Wheeler, an administrator, expressed that, "A good ARD is one where agreement is met through consensus", "…we can work through this" and, "…it's a negotiation." However, parents expressed this belief with more conviction and with greater explanation than the administrators:

- Two adults should be able to work things out, you know? Talk about them and work them out. Like in the meetings, you know, like today when I asked those questions she answered them… We can come to an understanding. That's what I think. I mean, maybe a

lot of people don't think like that, but I figure well, we talk it out and we come up to a conclusion and see what we come up with.

- The school is not a daycare. A- the school for me is a tool to help me guide my child, to give me advice on how these are things that he might need and you – you know you can't some parents let- think that the school special is supposed to do everything, well it's not. We as parents have to take responsibility also and that's what I'm doi- I take responsibility.
- 'No' is a wall that is very hard to- very hard to break down but if you say okay, then let's try, you know, then there's a chance.
- …if you're gonna be open-minded you're gonna listen to what I have to say and hear my side and I'm gonna listen to what you have to say and we'll come to a medium and we'll work together.

In other words, while the administrators valued consensus through negotiation, as something desirable, the parents valued collaboration for a compromised agreement with far more emphasis than the administrators. For the parents, this was the relationship they were trying to create with the administrators, as adults reaching shared understanding, and finding the middle ground. For the administrators, the attachment to this middle ground building relationship was less than the parents, even though they valued consensus. Yet, I remain convinced that expectation of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEIA) is a viable option for stakeholders at ARD meeting.

While the parents and the administrators identified ideals that were similar, one of the ideals that they both agreed strongly on was prioritizing the needs of the child during the ARD meeting. However, the parents and the administrators took different perspectives on how they

referred to the child, which can also be the reason for the communication gaps between the participants. All three parents were mothers with a male child receiving special education services in the school district and each mother referred to her child as *child* or *son* throughout the study. Administrators, however, generally referred to the young person as "student," a term that implied distance in the relationship. While no participants mentioned this difference, it established a marked distinction in the perspectives of the parents and administrators. For example, one administrator used the term *student* 50 times and the term *child/son* only 19 times. Conversely, a parent in the same meeting used the term *child/son* 68 times and the term *student* only three times. Figure 9 visually represents the discursive difference in the use of these terms. When the term *student* was used, the school's perspective became the dominant and overpowering one. When the term *child* was used, the parents' perspectives dominated the conversations.

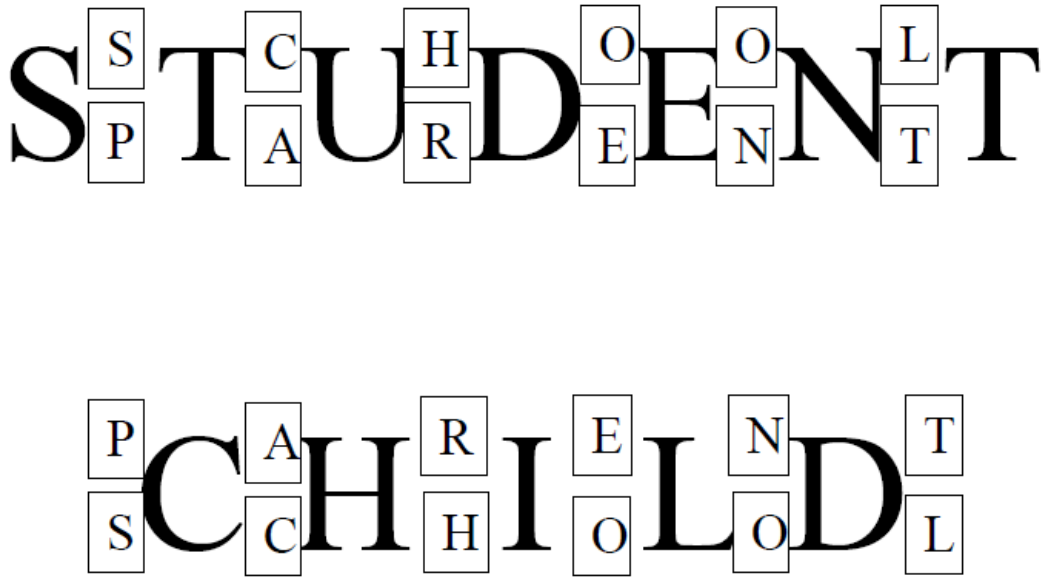


Figure 9. Child/Student Perspective
Note. Representation of differences in perspectives regarding the young person, the school and the parent. With the student as the focus, the school's viewpoint overshadows the parents'. With the child as the focus, the parent's perception dominates the school's.

Regardless of the difference in their perspectives, both parents and administrators expressed that the purpose of the ARD meeting was to address the needs of the young person.

Differences also evolved in the determination of what the child's needs were. Parents focused on making sure their children were happy, safe, represented and received all services allowable. One mother, Elaine Palmer, responded to an interview question about why she attended the ARD meeting by saying, "…basically, I really don't know, but you know, but like I'm there because I want to be there for my son to know, you know." Although she may not

have known exactly why she was at the meeting, being present at the meeting was her way of taking care of her son. Another parent, Jessica Johnson, responded to the same interview question by stating, "But the only thing we have in common is my son. You know, I want him to take a lot of knowledge on this, you know? Because it's not for my benefits… he's just- and he needs all that." In other words, Jessica wanted what she considered to be best for her child so she attended the ARD meeting. She explained that although she gained information at the meetings, she did not participate in the meetings with any expectation of a benefit for herself other than an awareness of how Jeremiah's needs were being met through school services. Ruby Williams, another parent, clearly explained her intention to have her son Jack's needs met when she shared the following:

> I'm real like that because nobody's gonna fight for my son, nobody …this ARD is not about me… That's why I sit here, that's why I say no and I say yes or I agree or I disagree, not for me but for him. This ARD is for him, whether he be here or not, it's all about him.

This excerpt reveals Ruby's motivation for attending and participating in the ARD meeting. Her use of the term *fight* places her in a combative position, similar to when she mentioned the need to be prepared earlier in this section. Placing the focus on the child instead of themselves was a consistent practice amongst all three mothers as they conveyed a need to make sure that the services put in place at the ARD meeting were meeting their child's needs. Two of the three mothers mentioned the need to have things in place for their child after their own death. This exemplified the depth of a parent's need to provide for her child even when the parent is no longer around to do so. Thus, prioritizing their child's needs included battling for what was

happening in the present and making preparations for what parents perceived to be future needs of their child.

Similarly, most of the administrators illustrated that they too prioritized the students' needs. Explained in the context of the student's future, one administrator made attempts to create an opportunity for the student to practice independence and self-advocacy. For example, the school staff had asked Ruby if Jack could join the ARD meeting. The members of the staff explained that they wanted Jack in the ARD meeting, even if for just a portion of the meeting, so he could be comfortable with the process and share his input about his services, classes, and what he wants to do after he completes the school's program. In spite of these reasons, Ruby refused their request. By the end of the meeting, Pat Wheeler, the administrator, had circled back to this topic two more times and included why it was important and provided the following explanation for doing so:

> … [T]here was twice in there where I knew the ARD hadn't quite listened to her feelings and I came back. I pushed a little more about bringing the boy into the ARD 'cause I felt that is important and I knew that she didn't want that but I did have to push on that….

While both the parent and the administrator were working in the best interest of the child, they did not perceive the best interest similarly. Pat's perspective of what was best for Jack was based on years of experience with other students. In other words, Pat knew what had worked with other students who were similar to Jack and based his recommendations on this experience. Ruby's perspectives, however, stemmed from her obviously more personal and extensive experiences with her son. Although Ruby had no reference of other students to compare Jack to in order to gauge his success, progress or potential in school, she believed that she knew what was best for her child. Otherwise explained, the competing views of "quantity" versus "quality"

resulted, with the administrator's view drawn from a large quantity of experiences that involved various students, programs and outcomes, and the mother's perspective derived from more in-depth and quality experiences with one child, her son. In this scenario, the mother ultimately acknowledged the administrator's request by nodding affirmatively as the school staff justified their appeal. Although Ruby offered no affirmation or agreement to the final plea regarding Jack attending the ARD meeting, Pat interpreted her reply as such by explaining,

> I think we made some headway in terms of her thinking about having the child in the ARD. She started to absolutely- to not, at the end with the final push of, 'Well, we'll see.' I mean I think that shows that she is thinking about it rather than just being completely opposed to it…

In other words, Pat interpreted Ruby's lack of overt refusal combined with a positive head nod as a positive response or at least progress in the right direction. That Pat did not view the parent's response as agreement demonstrated that agree or disagree are not the only options when collaborating. By assigning positive meaning to the fact that the mother did not oppose the recommendation, Pat acknowledged more progress toward agreement than disagreement. Otherwise stated, this administrator understood that there is a range of responses that lie between the polar opposites of agree or disagree and responses that move the discussion closer to a positive resolution for everyone involved should be recognized and appreciated as incremental progress, a movement in the right direction.

Ruby, however, had a different perspective of this experience which she explained as she asserted, "Just like they want him to come in when he's 18, okay, yes that's your opinion. I'll nod my head and say, but my opinion is as a parent it ain't gonna happen…" Thus, the same occurrence was met with nearly opposite perspectives. The administrator thought progress was

being made while the mothers' actions were taken to simply appease the school staff, almost in an effort to stop them from repeatedly making the same request.

Another administrator, Taylor Windham, prioritized the students' needs in multiple ways. First, Taylor kept decisions and discussions during the ARD meeting centered on the student. While facilitating discussions, Taylor explained that a parent may be asked, "How do you see that helping your child?" or "Well, what do you find works at home?" This ideal of serving the student was also expressed during an interview with the researcher as Taylor reiterated one goal of the ARD meeting being to "…see that the child's being served and trying to move them ahead." An additional example of this value was conveyed in the following exchange:

> TAYLOR: …we wanted to be sure that we didn't start missing things and you know, just kinda glazing over stuff that was important.
>
> AMY: Okay, important to you? Important to the parent?
>
> TAYLOR: Important to the child.

By ensuring that the services the student was receiving enabled that child to make necessary educational advancements, Taylor demonstrated student progress as a priority, which at times seemed to supersede the needs of the parent. Another way that Taylor exposed the magnitude of value placed on providing for the student's needs could be seen in the comments, "…when we have a parent that cooperates it really helps us," and "We can't be the voice for their child." While these statements were made in the context of explaining why parental input during the ARD meeting was vital, they also revealed the value that the administrator placed on the perspective of the student as the ARD committee worked to meet the needs of that student, and that perspective can be better understood with a cooperative relationship with a parent.

Given that the above discussion focused on the ideals of parents and administrators, Figure 8 offers a visual representation of overtly shared ideals and ideals that were implied by parents and administrators. Overtly shared ideals represent those ideals that either the parents or the administrator shared directly in their discourse either in ARD meetings or in interviews. Implied shared ideals reflect what participants implied as a possible shared ideal based on their action or reflective discourse. For example, an administrator might value being organized and prepared for the meeting by having all the relevant paperwork accessible, all stakeholders present, and the meeting conducted according to items on the agenda. On the other hand, Ruby's walkout of a meeting due to the school not providing her with appropriate paperwork implied that she too valued being prepared and organized. Thus, the lack of identification of ideals as those of parents or administrators is an intentional effort to highlight that the practice of ARD meetings could benefit from all of these ideals and that these ideals were shared in overt or implied form.

Overtly Expressed Ideals

- Collaboration
- Follow the policy but be flexible
- Focus on students' needs

Implied Ideals

- No surprises, organized
- Purpose of meeting fulfilled
- Move child forward
- Parents and school agree
- Decisions made will be followed through
- Administrators are attentive
- Parents feel respected

Figure 10. Overtly expressed and implied shared ideals of parents and administrators.

Participants' Roles in ARD Meetings

Through their discourse, participants exposed roles that they fulfilled as members of the ARD committee. All participants shared that they have previously participated in numerous ARD meetings. Informed by their ideals, participants' roles and functions were also developed as a result of their previous experiences. In this section I discuss the most prevalent roles shared by the participants.

Enforcers

A commonality among parents and administrators regarding their function at ARD meetings was to enforce responsibility. However, what each group assumed responsibility for was somewhat different, although both groups aligned with legal compliance. Parents and administrators communicated that compliance with laws and regulations related to special education was important to them.

Considered as their right, mothers saw themselves as enforcers as they communicated their responsibility to enforce the law by holding the school district accountable, even if it involved taking legal action. The shared ideal of accountability can be linked to the role of the enforcer. While parents can take legal action against schools at any time for many reasons, two of the three mothers mentioned violation of confidentiality as a potential reason to sue the school district. These mothers worried that private information about their child might be revealed to those who are not involved in the child's educational services. In one situation Ruby Williams displayed anxiety about confidential documents regarding her child that had been found in the campus locker room. In reference to ARD meeting content, another parent, Jessica Johnson, mentioned, "…they can't discuss what we discuss there to nobody because if they do I could sue." In both of these examples the mothers assumed responsibility for holding the school accountable for compliance with the law in regard to confidential information about their

children. Since legal action was mentioned as an option, this demonstrated that the parents had knowledge about the rules and regulations related to confidentiality of special education information. However, as parents did not wield this knowledge as a threat, they seemed to be more intent on protecting private information than finding a reason to sue the school district. Enforcing their expectations of compliance with the law was another way that parents communicated their ideal of accountability.

Administrators expressed the role of enforcer through their responsibility of maintaining legal compliance, imposing what they perceived to be an efficient use of time, facilitating the input of other school staff and managing the flow of the ARD meetings. There seemed to be a presumption of compliance amongst administrators, as this role was only mentioned in response to parents' questions or during interviews with the researcher. Midway through the second ARD meeting, what started out as a simple question from Ruby about whether or not Jack would be eligible to play basketball the next school year turned into a lengthy discussion. The outcome of this discussion was that either Pat Wheeler or one of the teachers would follow up to verify Jack's eligibility. At the end of this ARD meeting Ruby turned toward Pat and said, "And you're gonna check on UIL rules" to which Pat responded, "Yes, oh yeah, UIL rules." To provide further context, in order for Jack to play basketball, the administrator needs to ensure that proper rules are followed and that those rules indicate that Jack is eligible to play. Ruby, being aware of the existence of the rules, chose to play the enforcer, where she held the school accountable to review the rules to assess Jack's eligibility. Ruby refused to play the role of what she imagined, to simply sit through the meeting and sign paperwork. While such expectation was not directly or indirectly communicated by the administrator or school staff, it is powerful to recognize how people, in this case mothers, presume what others' perceptions of them are. This

seemed to be a way for Ruby to justify her purpose, proving what she believed was the school's perception of her to be wrong by taking on an active role of the enforcer, and perhaps by situating herself as just as much of an expert as the school was. The administrator, in this case, was required to concede to Ruby's requests, as she was asking for compliance-based solutions for her son.

Thus, the parents' ideals of accountability were demonstrated by enforcing the campus' compliance with laws and regulations while administrators' demonstrated accountability for themselves regarding procedures and mandatory elements of ARD committee meetings. Both groups demonstrated their enforcer roles through various actions revealing their ideals for the ARD meeting.

Parents as Protectors

Parental discourse indicated that they fulfilled the role of protector. Each mother, although stated differently, clearly conveyed that one reason she attends ARD meetings is to protect, defend, and support her child. They did so through phrases such as, "…fight for my child," "…make sure he is not taken advantage of," "…when he's here he feels like he's ganged up. We're not gonna let – I'm not gonna let that happen," and "…to be there for my son." The need to be protectors of their children emerged from what they perceived to be a potential violation of the child's rights. In other words, these mothers knew what they believed their child deserved and were insistent that their child not be denied any service, item, or opportunity. One mother implied a history of negative school experiences for her son while another claimed to have first-hand knowledge of students not receiving what is expected or promised in an ARD meeting. This protective stance implied a lack of trust. Reasons for such mistrust can be as unique as the parents' experiences or may have been due to a lack of knowledge, feeling

intimidated, or a combination of these reasons. However, the lack of trust underscored a key aspect of ARD meetings – the kind of relationship the parents and administrators were able to build with each other. If the parents were mistrusting of the administration or felt that their child was not offered the services that the child deserved under the law, then the relationship developed with administrators was fraught with conflict. On the other hand, if the parents perceived the administrators to be invested in providing their child with all the relevant services that are legally allowed, then the parent was much more willing to work amicably with the administrators. The only other instances where parents were agreeable with the administrators were because they were uninformed and did not feel confident to raise questions due to their lack of knowledge.

Regardless of the reasons, these mothers did not hesitate to protect their child from either perceived or real threats of unfair treatment. They were equally protective when any suggestions were made regarding limited access to what they considered rightfully theirs for their child. The ideal communicated through the role of protector was to have clear information to build shared understanding and agreement. A simple example of this is when a mother, Elaine Palmer, asked the school staff to define what they meant by "counseling" for Abel when she said, "Counseling as in what?" Once she had this knowledge, she could protect Abel. Otherwise explained, parents seemed not only to protect their child, but also to protect themselves from being uninformed, as that could lead to them failing to shield their child from any wrongdoing.

For Ruby Williams, being Jack's protector seemed to transform into advocacy at times. She stated, "This ARD is for him, whether he be here or not, it's all about him." Ruby did not grant the school staff's request to allow Jack to be involved in the ARD meeting. She justified her refusal with explanations that being in the meeting made Jack's head hurt and he didn't

understand what was happening. She later bolstered her reasoning by explaining that Jack does not like it when everyone talks about him in front of him. This information, shared during the meeting, was consistent with later conversation during an interview where Ruby shared that the meeting was not about making her happy or giving her what she wanted, but about making sure Jack got what he wanted. For Ruby, her priority was for her son to be happy. She was emphatic that the ARD meeting was supposed to be for her child, and not for her. She also went to great lengths to explain that she spoke to Jack about what classes he wanted and then shared his choices with the committee. As a result, she seemed to create the need for her to represent her child, wherein she must be her child's voice because he was not there. Knowing that Jack was not a part of the meeting because she would not let him be there seemed to create an opportunity for self-appointed advocacy. It seems that Ruby did not see her son as able to articulate what he wanted or felt in a public setting but that he was capable of articulating himself to her in a safe environment. Perhaps Ruby feared that Jack would be vulnerable or taken advantage of if he was present at the ARD meeting to express what he needed and wanted.

The conversations demonstrating enforcer roles for both parents and administrators were lengthy and not necessarily evident from one or two exchanges or excerpts. The conclusions made about the participants playing these roles were reached through deep analysis and combination of various excerpts to synthesize the actions of the parents that align with the roles. Thus, a description of the roles was provided with summarized examples or examples with excerpts and explanation, as appropriate.

Parents as Advocates

It can be said that many parents advocate for their child. Such advocacy seemed a natural way of relating the two ideals of gaining parental input and listening to parents. At times there

might have been different standards about how much a parent can push her child as opposed to how much others can push that child. In this study, such advocacy will be referred to as *parental prerogative*, which can be wielded to gain power or sympathy. For example, Ruby Williams stated that she has to "fight" for her son to make sure his rights don't get "rolled over." She shared this as she explained that Jack cannot fight for his own rights because he does not understand. This viewpoint was also shared by Elaine Palmer when she stated, "He's my son and…I mean, I'll do anything for my kids." While administrators may have considered themselves engaged in a fight for what they believed was best for the student, their position was not typically accepted by the parent. For example, when discussing efforts made to empower Jack to be more independent, Pat Wheeler, an administrator, explained,

> That's probably one of the hardest things to deal with in this ARD specifically, and in general, is when a parent has a view that their child only functions at this certain level and to push them beyond that is somehow wrong.

In other words, Pat perceived a benefit and a means for the student to become more autonomous. Perhaps such a recommendation was perceived as a challenge to the mother's beliefs and expectations of her child. Conceivably parents believe that they, as the parent, know what is best for their child, therefore no one else has grounds to fight for their child, especially against them as the mother. This highlights another reason why gaining and listening to parents' input is valued as an ideal by parents.

Another example of *parental prerogative* revolved around an administrator encouraging a parent to accept that trying new things, such as having a job, may benefit the child. Ruby Williams' response to the administrator's suggestion revealed her belief that Jack was not able to maintain employment as she said, "…from what his doctors are telling me and where he's at

he'll never be able to hold down a job." In another setting she reiterated her belief when she stated, "My son, he's never going to be able to work. We know that, the psychiatrist knows it." However, Ruby later confessed, "I do push him. You know I push him and I shouldn't and be so hard, but one day I'm not going to be there. Like I always say, he's gonna have to deal with that, you know." In these examples, *parental prerogative* was used to augment whatever stance the mother was taking at the time, even if it was oppositional, to justify parenting efforts or to legitimize decisions. In order to legitimize her position as the parent and an expert on her child, Ruby emphasized that even psychiatrists agree with her position and created a divide between campus experts and experts with whom she aligned. Thus, by aligning in such a manner, she was provoking the school to take a stance where they would have to challenge the evaluation of the psychiatrist. Such overt posturing by an administrator could easily lead to a conflict, a path that is undesirable for the administrator, since many of them valued a complete meeting with all documents signed. Therefore, in this case, Ruby situated herself in a discursive position where she aligned with the advice of her son's psychiatrist and advocated for actions that reflected such alignment. This discursive positioning offered an invitation to the school staff to either situate themselves in some directly opposing discursive position or to engage with her where Ruby situated herself.

Parents as Caretakers

Another role exhibited by parents was that of caretaker. For mothers, the role of a caretaker embodied the ideal of prioritizing their children's needs. While this was a mutual ideal for both parents and administrators, the latter conveyed this through a different role, as a provider, which will be discussed later in this section. This role was communicated by the mothers through statements such as, "Make sure that he's getting the proper education, he's

getting taught at his level that he's not gonna be bullied", "I'll do anything for my kids" and "I want him to be in there and just learn and learn and learn." These statements represent an intuitively obvious understanding of the mothers' role as a caretaker. Ruby often situated the discursive decisions made in an ARD meeting about her son in terms of an *us versus them* binary relationship. This meant that Ruby was extra vigilant about what the school was doing, if they were following the law correctly, if they were genuinely looking out for the best interest of her son, and if she was fully prepared to fight for her son's best interest by being equipped with information prior to the meeting instead of being surprised at the meeting.

On the other hand, Jessica conceptualized her role as a caretaker differently than the other mothers, who were much more suspicious of the school's ability to meet their children's needs effectively without the mothers' advocacy. Jessica identified herself as someone who was not as well informed as she needed to be and trusted the school's authoritative position when they made decisions about her son. Generally speaking Jessica played a minimally participatory role in the meetings, as she trusted most of what was said by the administrators and considered her being present and hearing what was being suggested was a key role to play in taking care of her son's educational needs. Jessica usually depended on the information provided by the school staff as she allowed herself to be led through discussions. An example of this was her answer to the question I asked Jessica during our interview, "And so will you have another ARD meeting before the end of this school year?" Jessica's response was, "They didn't tell me, so I don't know." Another time Jessica was discursively guided by Adrian through the conversation about Jeremiah attending school for half of the school day and the social service center for the other half of the day, since he had many school credits.

ADRIAN: The services that MHID could provide to him, um>>> , because of- they have, um>>> , they have day-hab and their hours run a certain amount of time and if he's gonna be on campus here we have to keep him so many hours a day and. It's uh>>> just kind of working out what would be the best that for Jeremiah, if he would come here half a day and go there half a day or alternate because we have, um, an alternating schedule.

JESSICA: Um-hm ((affirmative))

ADRIAN: Like he doesn't meet all of his classes, um>>> today and then meet them again tomorrow. It'll rotate constantly so just, uh>>> trying to make that all fit for Jeremiah and what his services would look like.

According to Jessica, she did not understand nor agree but accepted the committee's recommendation because she knew even if she voiced her dissention she would be "over-voted." The message that she received was clear: her job was to listen to be an effective caretaker so that she can learn and understand. In a later portion of the interview Jessica shared the following about collaboration: "…adults should be able to work things out…we can come to an understanding."

Yet in the later meetings Jessica seemed to participate more vocally and asked questions. Somewhat egotistically, I assumed that perhaps Jessica was performing for the camera or for me. As I inquired further about the reason for Jessica's increased activity during the meeting, she shared, "Well I just feel I need to ask some questions because, uh, I don't know what's going on, you know?" Therefore, Jessica became an active parent because she did not want to remain ignorant about procedures and policies and decided to shift her discursive position. Additionally, Jessica conceptualized that by asking questions she is better able to take care of her child's educational needs because then she understands the reasons behind the recommendations made

by experts for her child. By asking questions, Jessica was empowering herself in her role as a caretaker by being more informed. It was as if once Jessica was able to understand what was happening with her son's classes, services, schedule, and graduation, she had opinions and questions. Most often her input involved asking yes/no questions, requesting more information, or agreeing with the group's recommendation. Perhaps it was due to the reflections in interviews with me that Jessica identified more with her ideals as a caretaker and chose to situate herself differently in the ARD meeting. However, this choice did not imply that Jessica was discursively posturing the same way as Ruby did. Despite asking questions for clarification or elaboration, Jessica conceded to the school's authority to know what might be the best recommendations were for her son. Her role as a caretaker was to remain informed through questions.

Another ARD meeting for Jeremiah, Jessica's son, was held approximately five months later. In this meeting the staff were unsure of how many credits Jeremiah had earned and were unable to determine whether or not he was going to complete the school program this year. During the interview that followed the meeting Jessica shared,

> I want him to go until next year, but they want him to complete the program this year so I said, 'Okay' but I wonder if it was the right thing for my son by saying that about him completing this year or say, we'll let him wait until he's 21.

In other words, she wanted him to stay in school as long as he could so that he could learn as much as he could. When asked during the interview why she did not voice her disagreement in a more pronounced manner, Jessica explained,

> I just sit there and listen to what they have to say. But, uh, today I decided to speak when they told me about his credit and all that and that he wasn't going to finish the program because I wanted to know why was the reason.

Therefore, even though Jessica held a position different from the school, in her view, being a caretaker meant that she understood why the school was positioning themselves differently than she did. At the end of this ARD meeting she again agreed with committee as they planned to investigate Jeremiah's credits. Yet another meeting was scheduled to take place within the next 20 days and Jessica was assured that the school would have all the information they needed to determine if Jeremiah's educational future would involve staying in school for one more year. After the ARD meeting I asked Jessica how she felt about the delay in the decision and her reply was, "Kind of-not angry, but maybe I didn't understand, you know. Why do they need credits for?" Further into the interview, the topic of Jeremiah currently attending school for half a day arose again and Jessica said, "If he didn't have enough credits they should have left him all day to make up the credit, you know, but they didn't." This statement again indicated that Jessica disagreed with the ARD committee's previous recommendation. While Jessica did not indicate her disagreement during the ARD, she did so during the interview, but as she did not consider herself a part of the decision-making process, her agreement seemed to be a reflection of that process. Nonetheless she trusted the school's recommendation and demonstrated compliance by signing relevant documents. It seems that Jessica situated herself in some considerably different positions than the school about her son's educational needs. However, because Jessica felt poorly informed most of the time and needed to be led by the school, the best caretaking move for Jessica was to become more informed by people she deemed to be experts on educational services, the school. Therefore, despite disagreement, Jessica perceived her role as a caretaker as

needing to understand the school's position for recommendations and not as contesting those recommendations.

A final ARD meeting was held on the last day of April for Jessica's son. As Jessica did not dispute the recommendation, the ARD committee awarded Jeremiah the credits he had earned, which set the stage for him to complete the school program the following month.

ADRIAN: Looking at all of that based on a 3.0 scale, uh, Jeremiah has met all of the credits that he needs to complete his program here at South this year. And so our – it's gonna be our recommendation that he will complete his program of services this year. Are you okay with that, Mom?

JESSICA: Yeah.

It seemed as though she instantly accepted the school's determination that Jeremiah was eligible to complete the school program. As the ARD meeting came to an end Jessica maintained her role as caretaker, but changed her focus from an educational context to a social one as she said,

JESSICA: I'll be there when he completes his program. I gotta buy me a camera.

ADRIAN: Any other questions, Mom, that you have? No?

JESSICA: That's about it.

ADRIAN: Okay, all right.

JESSICA: Thank you very much.

Parents postured as the caretaker in different ways but always considering what they thought was in the best interest of their sons. In other sections, it was revealed what Ruby viewed as best ways to advocate for her son. Elaine was remarkably quiet but was represented in the excerpts above where she expressed that she would be willing to do anything for her son. However, what was of interest was that even though at first Jessica's posturing would appear to be conceding

with the school's recommendations without taking care of her son's needs, according to Jessica, being well informed from a trusted source was taking care of her son's needs, as she recognized that she was ill-equipped to offer evidence-based counter-arguments. She trusted the school's position in her son's educational well-being and positioned herself as a caretaker, albeit differently from the other parents.

Administrators as Taskmasters

Three roles for administrators became evident from their discourse, one of which was taskmaster. In illustrating the ideals of being prepared and having answers to questions, administrators shared information about the role of taskmaster as it related to the ARD meeting. With emphasis on progress, they explained that one of their functions included sustaining forward momentum, keeping everyone on task and accomplishing the purpose of the meeting. Following are statements from administrators that exemplify their perceived role of taskmaster:

- There are only so many hours in the day… when we are taking that much time for a single student we are taking that much time away from 30, 40 students in other classes and we need to be much more cognizant of details.
- I try to keep it on track and keep us moving along…
- Is there anything else in transition?
- (interrupting dialogue amongst others) And we're ready for the ARD? Okay.
- I am the one that runs most of the ARDs.
- Any other questions, Mom, that you have? No?
- As an administrator you feel this pull of your time and your resources and you see these conversations going on and on and on and on and sometimes you want to interject but you don't want to be rude, either, because maybe it is a good point that the parent is

> making, but there was 20 minutes of discussion prior to that and I think that gets a little frustrating that I wish we could get back to, you know, the questions and the business and, you know, make sure that the parents um >>> have their questions answered and that we're doing the right things and we are not rushing through it but sometimes they just uh >>> they're time consuming …it's a lot of time to dedicate to the ARD.

Another example involves what Pat Wheeler perceived as the task of getting Jeremiah to join the ARD meeting. Although done in the context of the student's progress versus the progress of the ARD meeting, Pat's statement, "We don't want to push him forward but we do want to move him forward" occurred multiple times throughout discourse. This sentiment of making forward progress, whether related to the student or the meeting, echoed the administrators' priority of task completion.

Given that one of the ideals that the administrator valued was a completion of the ARD meeting with a shared agreement reflected through signatures at the end of the meeting, it seems relevant that the administrators valued a meeting moving forward, tasks accomplished, members of the meeting prepared in their own roles, and making sure that the conversations were focused on the business at hand and not something else. Additionally, because the administrators felt that their time and resources were continuously compromised, the need to keep everyone on task to move the discussion forward was even more critical given that they perceived their role to be one where they met the needs of all students, not spending a disproportionate amount of time on one student.

Administrators as Negotiators

Discourse among most of the administrators also revealed that they saw themselves in the role of a negotiator. One administrator used the term "negotiate" to describe the administrator's

duty during an ARD meeting. This role was further clarified as mediating between parents and teachers. In order for this role to be utilized effectively, the administrator had to be perceived by the parent as somewhat of a neutral party. In other words, an administrator had to be considered an independent thinker and self-initiated action taker versus a talking head of the district and, when needed, as someone who would be a fair advocate of the parent. By questioning the school staff, making changes to their recommendations, and giving directives that echoed parents' requests, the administrator seemed to create some separation from the district as an entity. Such actions also presented the administrator as a deliberately involved participant and not one who unconditionally accepted the school staff recommendations as the best or only options for the student.

As negotiators, administrators sometimes negotiated between school staff and the parent. Such negotiation revolved around information or services. Following is an example of Taylor negotiating information for Elaine:

MARY: (Teacher) [Well uh, I haven't- he hasn't been in my class for a few weeks… just did it today so I feel like he kind of fell back a little bit. He's at a level F right now.

TAYLOR: Which is? For Mom or me (nervous air expelled)?

MARY: [It's first?

VICKY: [It's like mid- first grade so it's starting to learn to]

TAYLOR: [There uh, yeah, there's so many different, okay.

Regarding the way Taylor spoke to teachers during the meeting, Elaine Palmer shared the following during the interview immediately after the ARD, "Like when they were talking about

the - I guess the grade levels - like it brought them down and was like grilling them for it." Elaine then followed that statement by saying, "I was like, 'Okay'," implying both surprise and appreciation for what she perceived to be the administrator consulting with the teachers on her behalf. Another example involves Pat Wheeler negotiating to get report cards sent home with Jack, as opposed to only mailing them:

RUBY: I've never gotten a report card.

PAT: Ms. Whitsitt should get it. Okay it it RR should be distributed in Ms. Whitsitt and Ms. Whitsitt can mail home if we don't have a a a RR reliable means of getting home with Jack.

RUBY: Yeah Delilah, Delilah will get it to me, you know. I think everything should be mailed.

PAT: I'm more comfortable, rather than depending on a sibling.

RUBY: Yeah.

PAT: Then mailing them I still think that, um, giving him a copy to bring home is still a valuable goal to be able to communicate and bring home but I-

I think we should always mail home an IEP the the -RR

RUBY: The only thing is that like the first set of copies more than sure you gave them to him, but they were in the locker room.

SARA: That's where he left them.

RUBY: Uh you know that's uh>>>

PAT: But- but is it still all right if we send a copy home with him? That way we can kind of encourage that behavior. Or would you- do you not [want that at all

RUBY: [I don't want it]

PAT: Don't want it.

RUBY: I don't want it because-

PAT: Okay.

RUBY: How what if someone would have opened them?

PAT: And then found them- so

RUBY: You know and [then-

PAT: [We're gonna mail IEPs home and not-

RUBY: Everything.

PAT: But the one- let me- one question- how about letting him take home a copy of his report card though like all- so that it's like all the other the other students? But we'll mail home a copy 'cause I don't want to set him apart [ ] because all the other students are gonna have a copy of their report card.

RUBY: [Yeah]

PAT: And so is that all right [if we-]

RUBY: [Yes]

PAT: But go ahead and mail a copy but we're we're RR gonna send a [copy home]

RUBY: [Copy home]

PAT: We'll do- we'll do RR both that way because I don't want uh>>> I don't want him to feel different about his report card [if that- if that's seems] all right with you.

RUBY: [Okay].

This is an example of Pat negotiating between what Ruby wanted and what Pat believed to be most appropriate for the student. In this case, Ruby was nervous about documents being in the wrong hands, breach of confidentiality, etc. Therefore, she requested that all the documents be

mailed home. While understanding Ruby's concerns and keeping Jack's best interest in mind, Pat negotiated a compromised solution where the student will get a copy in class like all other students to avoid being singled out for being a student with special needs, and copies will be mailed to Ruby at home. Ruby agreed to this arrangement. Thus, in the role of negotiator administrators represented the ideals of gaining and listening to parental input. As a result, there was mutual gain.

Another administrator, Taylor Windham, assumed the role of negotiator whose duty is to "...make sure things go smoothly." Taylor seemed to dedicate considerable effort to the prevention of conflict. With an intent focus on the parent's response during the ARD meeting, Taylor extended conversations when it was perceived or anticipated that the parent may have been in distress. For example, when school staff recommended 30 minutes of counseling a week for Abel, Taylor sensed the parent's discontent and initiated the following exchange:

> TAYLOR: So would you feel that could be helpful [through our- the school district to assign he some time each week not taking up too much?
>
> ELAINE: [It would be helpful yes. like 15, 20 minutes not-]
>
> TAYLOR: Not taking him too out-
>
> ELAINE: Yeah.
>
> TAYLOR: Once every two weeks for 15 minutes.

Other ways that this was accomplished were by asking staff to repeat information, rephrasing explanations, requesting more clarity of information and explaining data with more detail. During the interview, Taylor mentioned, "…I kinda will be the mediator." While mediator is a different term than negotiator, it serves the same purpose in this case, which is the mitigation of potential dilemmas. Additionally, when Taylor sensed that the mother was unhappy or confused,

Taylor quickly sought to respond with questions, clarifications, and examples involving the student. These efforts to anticipate uneasiness or misunderstandings allowed the administrator to minimize occasions for conflicts as well as create opportunities for the parent to participate.

An additional demonstration of serving as a negotiator was the importance administrators placed on addressing parent concerns. Instead of ignoring or dismissing parents' concerns, some administrators directly addressed such issues in an effort build consensus. For example, Pat Wheeler identified what was anticipated as a potential concern and asked the parent if she agreed. "Okay? Now we won't- again – anxiety seems to be an iss- a big issue that we're hearing and we won't go beyond any limit and any time that we address the anxiety it's always baby steps," to which Ruby responded in agreement with, "Uh-huh" ((affirmative)), "Okay," and "Yeah" through the next few discursive exchanges. By presuming a concern and verbalizing it before the parent could share it as a negative issue or author it as a topic of concern, Pat attempted to communicate a position of understanding and compassion. Likewise, this action created an opportunity for the parent to be collaborative or be empowered, which presented a chance to focus on the parent, further emphasizing that the administration values the parent's role. With all attention on the parent, negotiation with and amongst school staff became less confrontational, which created more opportunities for reciprocal decision-making. In most ARD meetings observed, administrators clearly performed the role of negotiator between the school staff and the parent.

Administrators as Providers

All administrators disclosed an expectation of having to be the provider during ARD meetings. While there were differing perspectives in what administrators sought to provide, there was absolute consensus regarding the administrator as the "steward of services" or as a

representative of the district's resources. The 34th chapter of the Code of Federal Regulations § 300.321 (a) (4) dictates that the ARD administrator is

> (4) A representative of the public agency who —
>
> > (i) Is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities;
> >
> > (ii) Is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and
> >
> > (iii) Is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the public agency.

Taylor Windham specifically referenced these duties by stating, "I'm the person that would promise services or resources," while other administrators implied these responsibilities through phrases such as, "Okay we'll look into everything we can do to support you, okay? All right?" or or statements such as, "Okay, okay, we'll make a call and maybe in that paperwork we'll find some of the credits that we're discussing this morning that Jeremiah would have to have in order to finish the program." Another example from an administrator demonstrates the provision of information as well as the reason for the recommendation:

> I do think that a- that as we progress through school that we try to get him comfortable with the ARD process. Because when he gets a little older it's his process and not yours anymore and we want to kind of prep him for that, so I think that that's a goal that we need to work [towards].

This discourse indicated that the administrators had a clear and accurate understanding of their duty to provide what is considered a free appropriate education and to provide information as well as provide support for the parents.

There was additional consensus among the administrators regarding other roles they fulfilled, with Pat Wheeler's expectations being the most congruent with the other administrators. By providing in-depth explanations and information known specifically, and sometimes only, by them, some administrators expressed an obligation to be the *lead communicator*. This was exemplified as administrators seemed to provide a context of leadership guidance, control or reassurance. The term *control* in this context implied organizational authority, such as maintaining the topic and pace of the ARD meeting, as opposed to any oppressive control of others. Otherwise explained, it was as if the combination of authority and the provision of information resulted in the perception of the administrator's contributions being the most credible or influential based on which people reacted.

Some administrators divulged a need to monitor others during the meeting. This was done both to prevent conflict and to seek affirmation of decisions throughout the ARD meeting. Such monitoring included a heightened awareness of body language, tone of voice, and actions of everyone at the meeting. Pat Wheeler explained,

> In an ARD the ideal situation for me is that I know that my all of my staff are going to get along and have a certain- or at least I know their- what their opinion is gonna be about these- the issues that are gonna come up and then I can focus on what the parent is saying and how the parent is interacting with each person. If I am unsure about what's gonna happen, if there's gonna be a point of conflict, then that's gonna take a certain amount of my attention. It's not focused on the parent or other parts of the ARD.

Thus, in this situation, the interactions amongst school staff demanded more monitoring from the administrator than those between the school staff and the parent. This led to reduced intentional attentiveness to the parent, which the parent could have interpreted as negligent or rude.

However, there was a previously established working rapport between the administrator and the parent, which allowed the administrator to provide the parent with sufficient attention and consideration. While many may take the act of providing attention for granted, as with one's discourse, it is the intention of the act that can communicate care and valuation.

Another example of how an administrator strived to be the provider was by responding to a parent's emotional display. During a conversation about her son's future related to his ability to maintain a job, Ruby Williams shared that she knows that her child has difficulties in many areas and shared that he has surpassed the "best outcome" projected by his doctors. She explained that she pushes him, perhaps too hard, and justified her actions as an effort to prepare the child for dealing with challenging situations because, "…one day I'm not going to be there." Throughout her explanation Ruby became tearful, to which the administrator, Pat Wheeler, and other persons in the meeting offered her encouragement and reassurance as well as a tissue. By providing Ruby with understanding and empathy Pat aligned the role of the provider. Following is what she shared in response to my comment about this exchange during the interview immediately following the ARD meeting:

> AMY: I did notice during the- during the meeting when you got emotional about jobs, um, everyone seemed very encouraging you seemed to accept that.
>
> RUBY: I want to accept it.
>
> AMY: Okay – but well, you seemed open-minded, which are qualities you said were good, and they seemed like they were encouraging- they're willing to try and you're willing to try and I thought that was a very good -
>
> RUBY: Yeah, they're willing to try. Yeah, I'm willing to try. I'm not gonna say- I'm not gonna say 'No' because no is – is not a good answer.

AMY: Okay

RUBY: 'No' is a wall that is very hard to- very hard to break down but if you say okay, then let's try, you know, then there's a chance. I might be wrong, doctors might be wrong.

AMY: And you have experienced that already based on what you just said.

RUBY: Um – hm ((affirmative)) Yes. So let's try, you know.

A key element of this exchange was Ruby's statement, "I want to accept it." The school staff, Pat included, fulfilled the role of provider by providing Ruby what they perceived she needed in that emotional moment. Although the term *provider* implies the provision of an item or service, in this situation the service provided was empathy. Ruby's statement communicated that she acknowledged that the school staff provided encouragement, yet she did not accept it. Ruby's statement also indicated an unwillingness to trust school staff. The results of this data reveal that in order for a parent to accept what the administrator or school provides, there must be some level of trust. Therefore, striving to fulfill the role of provider without such a relationship can be frustrating.

Thus, administrators play the role of the provider through many ways. In some cases the role of the provider is guided by the law, where they provide the parents with pertinent information, answer questions, and inform parents about policies, procedures, and educational services. In addition, the administrators perceived their roles to be providers by being lead communicators and by facilitating communication in the meeting in order to provide a desirable outcome. Finally, administrators provided services to parents, sometimes in intangible ways by being present, empathic, and demonstrating compassion for the challenges they experience as parents of a child with special needs.

In summary, in the above sections, I have demonstrated the roles parents and administrators played through conceptual identification and elaboration of these roles. The enforcer role for parents implied taking responsibility for and holding others liable for various elements of the ARD meeting, which typified the ideal of accountability. In addition, parents perceived their roles to be those of a protector, advocate, and caretaker invested in the best interest of their children, willing to wage a battle and fight for their rights. Comparatively, administrators identified their roles as taskmaster, negotiator, and provider. Serving as a taskmaster placed the administrator in command of the ARD meeting. An administrator as a negotiator implied some expectation of dissension as well as a duty to bring about agreement. While administrators framed their role as leading communication and minimizing wasted time during ARD meetings, this role could also be seen as managing procedures and discussions in a way that best serves the district. For example, it was common for administrators to change topics, bring conversations to an end, and limit the time and content of discussions. While outwardly done without malice or harmful intent, it set a tone of management with which everyone was expected to comply. A shared concern for the students' well-being, mentioned earlier as the ideal of prioritizing students' needs, can be noted in the roles of the provider, advocate, and caretaker. Based on this common thread of compassion, it can be determined that the perceived roles of parents and administrators were more similar than different, despite how these roles played out during ARD meetings and contributed to dilemmas.

Dilemmas, Strategies and Outcomes for Parents: "They don't seem to understand."

Eleven dilemmas were identified during ARD meetings, with seven of them being common amongst parent participants. Of these seven, three were mutual dilemmas for all mothers and are discussed in this section. These three dilemmas include disagreement with decisions of others, being unclear about persons and their roles in the ARD meeting, and

worrying what people at the ARD meeting thought about the parent or their child. In an effort to manage these dilemmas, parents utilized the following interactional strategies: (a) using humor, (b) sharing personal stories, (c) disagreement, and (d) silence. However, parents utilized these strategies differently and in response to different dilemmas. Thus, reflecting on the two of the research questions that guided this study, the following section is organized by dilemmas that were mutual to all mothers, followed by the various strategies used in response to each dilemma.

Dilemma: Unsure About Actions during an ARD Meeting

All parents described a similar dilemma: Being faced with decisions and recommendations for their child about which they were unsure. Discussions that occurred during the ARD meeting resulted in recommendations or decisions regarding the student's educational needs. Although not an exhaustive list, such decisions affected some aspect of the student's educational program such as scheduling, services, attendance, academic credits, or graduation. Mothers communicated this as a dilemma since they felt as though they were only consulted to agree or disagree with such decisions, as opposed to being a part of the process that resulted in the decision. In other words, had the parent been involved in the development of recommendations through discussion and idea sharing, then perhaps disagreement with a decision would not have been necessary. Regardless, this dilemma occurred and parents were left to address it. The mothers utilized four interactional strategies, which are exemplified in the following paragraphs.

Strategy: Ask Questions. One strategy utilized by parents when they encountered this dilemma was to ask informational questions. Some questions included the conversational move referred to as "staging", in which the speaker announces his/her intention to ask a question or share an opinion. By doing so, a speaker sets the stage to alert the listeners to what is about to occur. This conversational move can also be seen as an effort to gain the undivided attention of others before the speaker proposes a question. Following is an example of staging:

> PARENT: Ok let me ask this question uh, I normally don't ask questions but- Uh, uh, about the credits that he needs for graduation. That means that he won't be able to complete the program this year? Can he do it next year if he can't this year?

This scenario revolved around whether or not the student, Jeremiah, would be graduating in the current school year or the following school year. School staff recommended that Jeremiah complete his program within the next three months. However, the mother, Jessica, was not in agreement. While Jessica's use of this staging did yield answers and brought the group to a decision point, her dilemma was not resolved. The ARD committee explained that a final recommendation could not be made at this ARD meeting because the educational credit for courses that Jeremiah had taken in other school districts had not yet been verified. A plan was made to schedule another ARD meeting where the final recommendation regarding graduation would be made. Thus, the outcome for the mother was that her dilemma was unresolved and delayed to be addressed later.

Another example of staging is not asking a literal question but an implied question as a statement. Elaine said, "Okay. My other question is last year we asked for the art but because he had to take this other course in class he wasn't able to take the art." This statement was made as the ARD committee was discussing which teachers would be teaching which courses in the

upcoming school year. The topic of classes for the upcoming school year had already been addressed through compliance with Elaine's request that her son, Abel, be enrolled in art. Thus, the dilemma of uncertainty regarding Abel's classes for the following year had already been resolved to her satisfaction. In this example, staging was used to gain the focus of others and then instead of asking a question, a statement was made, seemingly with the expectation that the school staff would accurately interpret her implication of last year's events regarding the art class and respond accordingly. Whether Elaine's use of this strategy was an attempt to reiterate her point, test the group for consistency in their decision-making, or simply the result of forgetfulness is unclear.

As previously mentioned, not all questions asked by parents included the conversational move of staging. In most instances, the parents' informational questions were simple and direct. For example, when an ARD committee made a recommendation of counseling for Abel, the dialogue went as such:

ELAINE: Counseling as in what? Like telling him-

SAM: (provided explanation)

TAYLOR: More appropriate words.

ELAINE: Yeah. I mean, that's what I do at home if he's upset. We have- well, his caseworker before, she would give him a fot- where it has smiley faces, sad faces and then you just put the smiley face there and show her where it's at.

TAYLOR: So would you feel that could be helpful [through our- the school district to assign some time each week. not taking up too much?]

ELAINE: [It would be helpful yes. Like 15, 20 minutes not-]

TAYLOR: Not taking him too out-

ELAINE: Yeah.

Elaine's use of questioning implied that she did not have a clear understanding of what was meant by counseling. Through additional discussions, the committee learned that Elaine had experience with various types of counseling for her son, including private services in the home and counselor-recommended medication regimens. When counseling services for Elaine's son were mentioned during the ARD meeting, Elaine became unsure of what was involved and managed this dilemma by asking for more information. Once given the requested information, she was able to provide her input regarding these services, which yielded an agreeable resolution to her dilemma.

In an effort to minimize redundancy yet demonstrate the variation in the use of this strategy, three more examples of addressing dilemmas through asking informational questions are provided below, with a brief contextualization and outcome of the dilemma.

Example A. The ARD committee began to review a federally mandated supplement, which is, simply put, information regarding services being provided to Jeremiah based on his disability.

EDDY: So we're gonna look at his AU supplement.

JESSICA: What's that?

EDDY: Um, it's just things that we put in place for students who have autism.

JESSICA: Okay.

As she did not understand the terminology, Jessica, became unsure of the purpose of the discussion and asked, "What's that?" One of the ARD committee members briefly explained what the form was. While the school staff, Eddy's, response was abbreviated, because Jessica had entered the conversation with the state of mind that the school knew what was best for her

son and they were the experts, she accepted the unclear answer. Whether or not Jessica was in genuine agreement with this solution remains unclear, since her understanding was not clarified. However, Jessica's questioning clearly indicated that she was unsure of terms used and as an advocate and caretaker of her son, she requested further information.

Example B. As a part of the discussion of course credits the school staff reviewed courses that Jeremiah had already taken. Following is the excerpt of these exchanges:

> ADRIAN: We need to make some decisions- a couple of things; in order to either accept Jeremiah's credits for this year and then have him be able to go on um>>> from high school into uh>>> MHID's uh>>> care and responsibility and fulfillment of their obligations and duties that they have discussed with you. Let's start with language arts. Originally a- according to our record Jeremiah had uh>>> English 3 and English 4, which he received here on our campus and -
>
> JESSICA: Can I ask what's English 1?
>
> ADRIAN: English 1 would be uh>>> your entry level English class, and then English 2 would be the next level and then 3 and then 4 and then all students need to have uh>>> at least 4 years of uh, language. After reviewing his IEPs, which are his individual educational programs, like his goals and objectives like he had from Arcadia County, uh>>> Ms. Vickery, the special ed. administrator, Mr. Wheeler and myself reviewed all of that and we're able to make a determination that Jeremiah should be awarded credit for English 1 and English 2 while he was at school there and so that would complete his English fulfillment so he has met all the requirements for English.
>
> JESSICA: Oh, okay.

Using a different form of staging where Jessica rhetorically requested permission to ask a question, this parent interrupted the discussion that was leading to whether or not her son had enough credits to complete his program in the next three months. As that was not Jessica's preference, the discussion contributed to a dilemma for her. In this situation the use of the questioning strategy did not resolve Jessica's problem but it increased her understanding of how and why her son might be eligible to complete his program of services in the current school year. Otherwise explained, because the parent did not have a working knowledge about the topic of discussion, she was limited in her capacity to contribute, and that inability to meaningfully participate became more of a dilemma for her than whether or not her son would be graduating. However, being provided the information she asked for enabled Jessica to more readily understand, and eventually agree to, the recommendation made by the ARD committee.

Example C. As a part of the ongoing discussion during the first of two ARD meetings regarding Jeremiah's services, the following exchange occurred between Jessica and another school staff member:

JESSICA: Okay um>>> so he- he finish his speech?

EDDY: Yeah, she said he's finished with his IEP. He's mastered them all and she's dismissing him from speech.

JESSICA: Hmm… because my opinion, I'll say it, he needs more speech therapy.

EDDY: Okay.

JESSICA: Because he does like stutter or when he starts a conversation he stops and then like he has to then and then goes on.

EDDY: Okay.

JESSICA: So-

EDDY: Let me have her call you.

JESSICA: Okay.

It seemed that Jessica's question might have been a mother's attempt to understand what the term *dismissed* meant. However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, this question was used as a way for the mother to express her opposition. In this situation the parent's use of the informational questioning strategy, combined with staging her opinion afterwards, did not resolve her dilemma.

Strategy: Make a Request. Making a request was another interactional strategy utilized by all parents in the study. Again, when presented with the dilemma of uncertainty one way that parents managed the dilemma was to request either items or actions from the administrator or the school staff. The two scenarios that follow include examples of each. In the first interaction below, the mother, Ruby Williams, made a request without specifying who she expected to be responsible for addressing her request. Following her request, Ruby used the conversational move of echoing. Echoing occurs when the speaker repeats the same message multiple times either verbatim or with minimal variation of wording. In the fuller context of the exchange presented below between Pat Wheeler, the administrator, and Ruby Williams, the mother, overlapping speech occurred once when Ruby spoke over Pat. Pat repeated ideas with minimal to little variation four times, both Pat and Ruby engaged in repairing their ideas at least once, and neither interrupted each other.

RUBY: And I had a request: that I change his caseworker from Ms. Whitsitt to Ms. Pitt.

PAT: I don't know if I can honor that in the ARD right now because we'll have several students finalizing their program right now and we're making some changes in personnel

all within special ed., all within terms of moving their primary responsibility I - I RR think that is a definite possibility.

RUBY: Either her or Rogers.

PAT: Okay. Uh, I think that either one is a definite possibility. Uh, I just can't make that commitment here in the ARD. We will- we will- we will look and try to honor that request but I can't commit to it in the ARD. [Is that all right][1] ma'am?

RUBY: [Okay]

PAT: And, and uh, we'll look at caseloads at the end of this year, okay?

RUBY: I want Pitt or Ms. Rogers.

PAT: Okay.

RUBY: Um-hm ((affirmative))

PAT: I think that we can work that.

In the above exchange both Pat and Ruby echoed their positions multiple times. Ruby echoed her position of expecting a different caseworker and Pat echoed the administrative perspective of exploring for solutions at a later time without making a commitment at the meeting. The desired outcome of this dilemma for Ruby was a commitment from the administrator, Pat Wheeler, to agree to her request. But the administrator kept the response ambiguous by using terms like *definite possibility,* which implied that there was a possibility that Ruby's request could be honored but no commitment was being made at the ARD meeting. This form of posturing by the administrator offers the mother a positive response to her dilemma with an intent to address the dilemma to the mother's satisfaction as a possibility instead of a definite commitment. Even the hint of a possible intent of resolving the dilemma contributes toward a shared agreement instead

[1] Square brackets reflect overlapped speech.

of an accelerated conflict. This resolution did not yield absolute compliance with Ruby's request, yet it satisfied her enough to allow the meeting to continue. Such handling of requests demonstrates that the resolution of dilemmas does not have to be limited to a binary position of either agreeing or disagreeing with the parents' requests. Given that conflicts can arise due to several reasons, such as the topic, the basis of the conflict, persons involved, whether or not the issue is one that is revisited each year and the expectations of others, a dilemma may be resolved through explanation, withdrawn requests or collaboration, amongst many other possibilities.

The second scenario involved a parent employing the strategy of making a request regarding receiving paperwork. To contextualize her request, it is important to note that the conversation immediately prior to this request centered on parental rights. The committee members had explained to Jessica that due to his age, Jeremiah was considered an adult. As the adult student he was the sole decision maker regarding his education. When she was told that her son could legally make all educational decisions on his own at this very ARD meeting, Jessica stressed her position of authority by saying, "Well actually, he'll look at me."

In response to Jessica, one of the ARD committee members reiterated that in order to continue to be involved in such decision-making, the parent would need to obtain legal guardianship and provide the school a copy of it. The same person also offered to have a school secretary call the mother after the meeting and provide the contact information for legal services in the area. Immediately following that offer, Jessica stated, "And try not to give him no papers to bring home. Mail them all to me please, because I never receive them." Obviously, the dilemma faced by Jessica in this situation was the threat of not being involved in the educational decision making for her son. Without knowing her intent, Jessica's employment of the request strategy for all papers to be mailed to her home could be considered a polite demonstration of her

authority, a way to bring the topic to an end, a way to justify why she lost the contact information that they provided previously, or a combination of these reasons. While her request was met with compliance, her dilemma was not resolved. Jessica's role remained ambiguous given her son's age and until she supplied the school with more paperwork, Jessica might not have a voice in her son's education. The dilemma remained unresolved because even though Jeremiah was legally an adult, he was not capable of making all the adult decisions the way someone without a disability would. This called for someone to look out for Jeremiah's best interest, and as his mother, Jessica saw it as her duty to protect her child, adult or not. However, the school's request for more paperwork triggered Jessica to position herself as a partnered decision-maker, making a request for all paperwork to be sent to her as well, mirroring the school's position as a key stakeholder in Jeremiah's education.

Strategy: Oppose/Refute. Another strategy used by parents to manage the dilemma of disagreement was to do just that: disagree. I demonstrate with three examples the various ways this strategy was implemented. One mother, Jessica, implied disagreement by asking the question, "Okay um, so he- he finish his speech?" to which the school staff corrected Jessica's assumption to be incorrect. Next, Jessica continued, "Hmmmm, because my opinion, I'll say it, he needs more speech therapy." Note that Jessica used the conversational move of staging and then drew the attention to her opinion. She disagreed with Jeremiah being dismissed from speech therapy based on the opinion she shared. However, according to Jessica, her disagreement was communicated through her question, not her opinion. She explained this further during an interview:

> JESSICA: So those were my questions to them because I guess they knew that I didn't agree with his speech therapy.

AMY: How did you know she didn't agree unless they said something?

JESSICA: Well, because I asked my questions.

AMY: Oh, you think because you asked questions they know you disagreed?

JESSICA: Wouldn't you?

AMY: Not necessarily. A question doesn't mean you disagree.

JESSICA: Me-- if you ask me a question I will look at you and say why are you asking me that question? You see that's me, though.

Consequently, there was an assumption made by Jessica that by asking a question of a person, everyone in the meeting understood that she disagreed with the recommendation. While her presumption was not shared by everyone, it did not prevent her from communicating her disagreement in her own way. In other words, Jessica's assumption was that not only was her questioning an act of disagreement, but that others were able to recognize it as such, too. Consequently, Jessica felt agentic being able to ask questions, an act that she perceived as a blatant gesture of disagreement. For Jessica, the act of being able to disagree was enough of an agentic position, as she later accepted the offer to have the Speech Language Pathologist call her and explain why Jeremiah was being dismissed from therapy services. As she shared in an interview following the next ARD meeting, Jessica had received that phone call and her questions had been satisfactorily answered. As a result, her dilemma of disagreement was resolved when she accepted the explanation and information provided by the school. Another example of this strategy was demonstrated by Ruby in the following excerpt:

PAT: So we're not planning to age out.

RUBY: No. I've been around too long to see kids in the system and nothing's happening. You know they're just learning the same thing so he will complete his program of services on time with his with his RR classmates.

Statements of overt disagreements from Ruby were plentiful in the study and included "I don't want it….I don't want it because…."; "…no, because it hurts his head. His words, his words: it hurts his head," and "No, it'll be his second art." Used as strategy for handling opposition to suggestions made during the ARD meeting, this technique served Ruby well, as her dilemmas were resolved according to her authorization. As I gained more insight about each parent throughout the study, the trend of disagreement did not surprise me. Ruby Williams used the oppose/refute strategy the most. Jessica Johnson utilized this strategy to make her point but not to hold her position. She was agreeable to any explanation provided to her, as long as she received an explanation. Perhaps because Jessica felt that she understood so little of the educational jargon, laws, policies, etc., she believed that by opposing or refuting and then by receiving an explanation, she was able to take a stand for her son. For the majority of dilemmas encountered, the strategy of disagreement, in whatever form, proved to be useful in bringing about resolution. Elaine was the least conversational parent out of the three parents and rarely engaged in this strategy.

Dilemma: Unsure of Whom is at ARD Meeting and Why

At the majority of ARD meetings there were people in attendance that the parents did not know and in some instances had never met or seen before. Taking into consideration the serious and legal nature of ARD meetings, it is easy to conclude that more people can equal more intimidation or worry for the parent. Likewise, parental involvement was limited when there were unfamiliar people present at the ARD meetings, as mothers seemed to be leery about

sharing personal information with people they considered to be strangers. Introductions of each person, including what department they worked in or what class they taught, were made at the beginning of every ARD meeting. In one situation, the mother, Jessica Johnson, asked a teacher who she was and where she "fit in" to the meeting. Thus, there are multiple elements to respond to in regard to this dilemma: the number of people at the ARD meeting, people that the parent does not know at the ARD meeting, and whether someone new or unexpected is at the meeting when the parent walks into the room. Following are strategies that parents used when faced with this dilemma.

Strategy: Keep Quiet. Keeping quiet implied that the parent was initially quiet at the ARD meeting and most likely non-participatory, as the main method used to conduct ARD meetings is through dialogue. Thus, the parent who utilized this strategy could not be cajoled or persuaded to change her method of interaction because she had not shared any of her position if she had not shared anything. If a person does not verbally participate in the ARD meeting then s/he runs no risk of looking uninformed or feeling embarrassed due to lack of knowledge. However, by not participating, she also relinquishes the opportunity to ask questions and gain information. Without information she would have little to contribute, and therefore the strategy to stay quiet feeds an unhealthy cycle of communication. On one hand, staying quiet by choice can allow a parent to reflect deeply on what is being said and evaluate the premise of each recommendation on her own without allowing anyone to cajole her into a position of their choice. From this perspective, staying quiet is strategic and agentic. However, when the choice to stay quiet is being made because a parent is embarrassed about her own lack of knowledge and unwilling to display ignorance in front of a group of people she is unfamiliar with, then the parent risks staying uninformed and existing in a state of conflict. Following is an example of Elaine Palmer

using silence as a strategic move and its consequences. It should be noted that all parents remained silent during the ARD meeting when faced with the dilemma of not being familiar with everyone in the meeting or not agreeing about who was at the meeting, yet they openly discussed the dilemma during an interview conducted after the ARD meeting. A brief excerpt of dialogue from one of these situations, the ARD meeting with Elaine, is shared here:

> TAYLOR: Okay, now that we're all in here I'm gonna go ahead and make introductions. Um, Ms. Palmer do you know Ms. Brown? Ms. Jenner? This is Ms. Strait, um, from our special ed. department. You met Ms. Sanders. This is Ms. Vickery.
>
> VICKY: We met last year. I conducted the annual ARD in August last year…before school started.
>
> TAYLOR: And we're here today for Abel's annual ARD meeting and before we get started I'm gonna read our statement of confidentiality and code of conduct.

During the introductions Taylor asked Elaine if she knew Ms. Brown and Ms. Jenner, and Elaine remained silent. When Ms. Vickery was introduced and she reminded Elaine that they had worked together before, Elaine remained silent. During our interview Elaine revealed that she was surprised that there were so many people at the ARD meeting. She stated,

> I was in shock when they had like the two teachers. I was like okay, what's really going on? Like I only expected, I knew you were gonna be there, but that's just us. Basically last time we did it was like four people.

Thus, because what was happening was different than what she expected, Elaine became suspicious, albeit not suspicious enough to ask questions or speak up about her worry. Another element that contributed to her dilemma was that Elaine did not know one of the people at the ARD meeting. As she explained during the interview, "I didn't know who his teacher was.

Never met her. This was the first time I ever met her." In an effort to cope with this dilemma, Elaine utilized the strategy of silence. At no point during the meeting did she ask who anyone was or why they were there, as she seemed to take a "wait and see" stance when faced with this dilemma.

Another example of strategic silence involves Ruby Williams. Ruby knew every person at her ARD meeting, but disagreed with who was there. While she remained silent about this dilemma during the ARD meeting, the following exchange took place during the interview immediately after the meeting:

> RUBY: Why wasn't like Coach Rogers here? You know she should have been here, not Ms. Mallard.
>
> AMY: Why? Who is Coach Rogers?
>
> RUBY: Because she works with him. That's one of the teachers that teaches him just like Ms. Whitsitt.
>
> AMY: Every day?
>
> RUBY: Every day.
>
> AMY: Okay. Ms. Mallard does not teach him every day?
>
> RUBY WILLIAMS: She doesn't teach him at all. So why do we have-
>
> AMY: Oh, okay. I'm learning.
>
> RUBY: Okay, so why has somebody that has- yes, she had him the freshman year; yes, she was the special ed. case man- uh, uh, case manager, but- and she knows what she knows. She's good at what she knows, but you don't see him every-. She sees my daughter every day, but you don't see my son. You don't work with him every day so

> why sit in there? Vocational-wise, yes, Ms. Long sees him. Yes, he's here. Yes, her input but why have somebody that does not work with him in here?

For Ruby, the dilemma involved disagreeing with who was at the ARD meeting and why. As she communicated during the interview, Ruby respected Ms. Mallard as a teacher and acknowledged her positive experiences with Ms. Mallard when she taught both of her children. Therefore, she elected not to speak up about her disagreement regarding Ms. Mallard's presence during the ARD. However, her dilemma was that input being provided about her son was not from teachers that work with him on a regular basis. For Ruby, if a teacher does not work with the student, their input may not be legitimate or timely, thus such input should not affect the educational decisions for the child. Unlike the previously mentioned scenarios, the strategy of silence did not bring any resolution to Ruby's dilemma during the ARD meeting since the person's presence continued.

Thus, the examples presented above demonstrate that the participants used silence strategically for various reasons. While on the surface that could be interpreted as intimidation, insecurity, self-survival or simple patience, each parent's reasons were different, including not to appear embarrassed, unwilling to share information in front of strangers, and questioning the presence and relevance of multiple people at the meeting. In both examples the strategic silence did not create a desirable outcome for either of the parents. The members at the ARD meeting remained, much to the discomfort of both the parents.

Strategy: Ask Questions. Only one parent used the strategy of asking informational questions to address the dilemma of not knowing who was at the ARD meeting. Before the ARD meeting began, the persons that were there made small talk about their weekend, pets and so on. As the parent entered the room, one teacher announced that other staff members were on their

way, introduced another teacher to the parent and then introduced herself to the parent. Following polite exchanges, Jessica Johnson asked, “And what department do you fit in?” The teacher explained her role and why she was at the ARD meeting. This mother was very clear in her questioning strategy and based on her participation in the small talk that followed, her dilemma was satisfactorily resolved, as she appeared to be relaxed and participated in small talk in a pleasant manner. This was not surprising since Jessica was the compliant parent who compensated her lack of understanding of complex details in ARD meeting by questioning and obtaining information.

Dilemma: Worry About What Others Think

A key source of dilemma for all three mothers was discursively positioning themselves in relation to the campus staff while keeping their sons’ best interest in mind. Both Jessica and Elaine were concerned about not being perceived as a good parent based on where and how they situated themselves discursively. Jessica was concerned that by wanting her son to stay in school longer, even though he was eligible to finish the program, she was being perceived as a bad parent who was using the public education as a babysitting assistance. However, for Jessica, it was because she wanted her son to learn as much he could possibly learn. Elaine was shocked to hear how the campus staff spoke of her son in front of her and became concerned that if her son misbehaved, then the conclusion that the staff were making was that she was not parenting well. Ruby was perhaps the most complex of all three mothers in terms of how she thought others perceived her.

Ruby was not concerned about being seen as a bad mother because she was confident that she was a good mother, so much so that Ruby considered herself just as much of an expert, if not more, on her son’s educational needs than the campus staff. Thus, Ruby was invested in

advocating for her son and herself as an informed, expert parent through various justifications. In the following sections, I provide some example of using justification as a strategy to address this dilemma.

Strategy: Justifications. Justification was used as a strategy by all three mothers to affirm their discursive position and to manage their dilemma about how others perceived them. The example below demonstrates Ruby Williams' justification about her reasons for not wanting Jack to suffer with anxiety from new experiences that may be difficult for him. Ruby's justifications involved presenting opinions of other experts, aligning with such opinions to increase the credibility of her positions.

> Yeah, but from what his doctors are telling me and where he's at he'll never be able to hold down a job…MHID, no. But with Dr. Ramsey, he's his MHID doctor here, but he sees him in Central City and he says the same thing. Okay, we're gonna try to get him something but it's gonna have to be something very, very simple.

Ruby also justified her choices by reiterating during the interview that she was serving as the voice of her son. This was exemplified through statements such as, "I let Jack voice his opinions" and "That's why I sit here, that's why I say no and I say yes or I agree or I disagree, not for me but for him" and "This ARD is for him. Whether he be here or not, it's all about him." Therefore, in order to not be misunderstood by others, Ruby justifies her reasons for disagreement, her reasons for being the voice of her son, her reasons for wanting something different for her son than perhaps what the administrators suggested. It can be implied that by her justifications that perhaps Ruby intended to create a shared and collaborative space for negotiations by offering herself as just as much an expert about her son's educational needs as others in the meeting. Ruby's discursive position was always a dual one, one for herself and one

for her son, even though she insisted that the ARD meetings were for her and not for him. The discursive position in which Ruby desired the campus staff to see her as was the legitimate expert on her son's educational needs, future potential, and limitations. The other discursive position in which Ruby situated herself was where she wanted to advocate for what was in the best interest of her son given the provisions of the law. While these two positions were not in contradiction to each other, often such positioning created conflict between Ruby and the campus staff if they did not agree with recommendations.

Jessica, on the other hand, remained troubled by how she was being perceived because she wanted her son to stay in school as long as he could. Jessica repeated her justification several times so that people would not think ill of her.

JESSICA: It's not like I'm a selfish mother because I want him to learn.

AMY: Of course.

JESSICA: I want him to learn everything he can in that school.

JESSICA: …but I'm still like, maybe I'm a selfish mother. I want him to be in there and just learn and learn and learn.

AMY: I wouldn't consider you selfish.

JESSICA: And, um, some people would have considered me selfish. 'You just want him in there because you don't want to be bothered with him' and all that. It's not that I don't want to be bothered with him. I want him to learn. Because I wanted him there all day because I want him to learn. And, uh>>>maybe my parents never took time in me to take me, you know, I had too many brothers and sisters and they didn't have time, but him, I want him to go.

Jessica's dilemma of what she perceived as being judged by others was profound enough for her to mention it at two different points during the interview around which 241 discursive exchanges occurred. By the end of the study, two things indicated that Jessica's dilemma had been resolved to her satisfaction: (a) Jessica's explanation of wanting more for her child than she had growing up justified her preference of Jeremiah being in school all day and (b) Jessica did not mention this dilemma again. While the parents in both examples used the strategy of justification in response to the same dilemma, one provided justifications specifically with respect to the perception of the ARD committee members while the other provided justification regarding anyone who might judge her decisions about wanting her son to remain in school as long as he possibly could. Ruby's dilemma remained unresolved at the end of her justifications, and Jessica's dilemma seemed to have been resolved.

Strategy: Keep Quiet. Only one parent used silence as a strategy when dealing with how others perceived her. Elaine had been a quiet participant compared to Jessica and Ruby. Very few pages of transcript were generated at the ARD interview in which Elaine participated. I had just begun the interview by asking Elaine, "So how do you think the ARD went?" Elaine responded:

> It went pretty good. I mean later on I was kinda upset when the teachers kept on just like when they were saying about my son that- I mean I know, I was looking directly at the people, but I could see them like- it's like just (talking to herself) calm, just be quiet, just do what you gotta do for right your son. But other than that, I mean it went right.

Elaine's change of perspective from, "It went pretty good" to "…I was kinda upset…" and then to "…other than that, I mean it went right" conveyed that she recognized the dilemma yet did not allow it to define her perception of the ARD meeting overall as she made a more positive

comment about the overall nature of the meeting by stating that it "went right." We continued reflecting on the ARD meeting:

AMY: Now you mentioned that you got upset with the teachers…

ELAINE: 'Cause I mean, I can see like- I don't know. I was paying attention and one like- and they were like (made a face demonstrating that they were looking at each other almost in disbelief, whatever kind of attitude based on researcher's interpretation), eyes like (demonstrated rolling eyes).

AMY: So you were bothered by their facial expressions.

ELAINE: Yes, like when they were saying, "Well Abel did this" and they're like (facial expression of judgment as interpreted by researcher) and then like I was like- I'm like- man, I'm just not gonna put nothing in there, like I wh- at at RR one point I was like do you have something wrong with my son that y'all just wanna let out?

AMY: But you didn't do that.

ELAINE: Yes.

AMY: Why didn't you do that?

ELAINE: 'Cause I know if I were to say something I would have said something the wrong way

AMY: Okay.

ELAINE: 'Cause I do have a temper, don't get me wrong.

AMY: Okay.

ELAINE: That's why I keep myself to just focus on what that was- I mean, yeah, that was a concern to me but that's just me. Like, you know, they probably weren't saying something bad, thinking something bad, but the way I took it was like- 'cause I would see

> um, the lady, she was sitting next to you[2] (researcher note: I was not at the ARD table but present while videotaping) and she'll talk and she like (facial expression of dislike as interpreted by researcher) and I was like (demonstrated taking a deep breath in through nose) just sit and just pay attention, pay attention.

At the end of the interview, Elaine stated, "No, I don't show facial expressions…I'll just shake my head and that's about it," in reference to how she handles herself in ARD meetings. Elaine communicated using minimal facial expressions during the ARD meetings and resisting the urge to become emotionally transparent. Yet, during the interview with the researcher, she was quite liberal with her facial expressions and emotional transparency. Such a contradiction indicated her intentional use of strategic silence as a way to handle the perceived dilemma of judgment from others that might jeopardize her son's best interest. That Elaine mentioned the need to calm down and be quiet alludes to her fear of reacting aggressively, perhaps with intense emotions, and silence became a way to contain the emotions. Furthermore, Elaine's use of self-talk and reasoning during her silence were effective tools that she used to manage the dilemma. Thus, in this example, Elaine used silence strategically even though she wanted to burst out at the people who were speaking poorly about her son. Knowing what her reaction could have been and that reaction could have hurt her son, Elaine chose to fight for her son by being silent. It is difficult to assess whether the dilemma was resolved for Elaine here. But at least Elaine's reaction to the dilemma did not cause the damage Elaine feared had she behaved in a more uninhibited manner.

There were eight additional dilemmas described by the parents. These are listed below and those with an asterisk indicate a dilemma that was shared by more than one parent:

[2] You refers to the researcher

- Not getting what was wanted*
- Being at the mercy of the knowledge and decision making of the school staff
- Receiving less than the undivided attention from administrators
- Being told how things will be done versus having a contributing voice in the decision making*
- Feeling ganged up on/over-voted*
- Having people in attendance at the ARD who did not currently and directly work with the child or were unknown by the parent*
- Breach of confidentiality
- Not being heard or being perceived as simply a token participant for legal purposes*

Table 9 displays a summary of these dilemmas and others encountered by parents and includes the discursive strategies and/or conversational moves utilized in response to the dilemma. A quick overview of Table 9 demonstrates that Jessica and Elaine used silence as a response to various dilemmas, while Ruby found alternate approaches. All three participants used questioning as a way to resolve their various dilemmas, and Ruby responded with ultimatums when she did not get what she wanted. Ruby and Jessica made requests as responses to various dilemmas, whereas Elaine never made requests for anything. Three parents shared personal stories, while Ruby and Jessica also used humor as a way to respond to dilemmas.

Table 9

Dilemmas and Responses of Parents

Dilemma	Ruby	Jessica	Elaine
Being at mercy of school staff for information		√ - Keep Quiet; Refute	√- Keep Quiet
Not being heard by others	√- Rephrase; Staging		
Feeling over voted;	√- Rephrase; Ask Questions	√- Keep Quiet	√ - Keep Quiet
Having no input in decision making; not being heard; being told versus asked	√- Rephrase; Echo; Ask Questions	√- Keep Quiet	
Not getting what wanted	√- Rephrase; Ultimatum	√- Ask Questions; Make Requests	√ - Ask Questions
System working to benefit the school instead of child	√- Ask Questions; Make Requests		
Administrator not providing undivided attention; does not demonstrate care during the meeting	√- Personal stories; Justification		
Law not followed; disagree with recommendations; breach of confidentiality	√- Ask Questions; Make Requests	√- Ask Questions; Make Requests	
Worrying about what others think of them and/or their child	√ - Use Humor; Personal Stories	√ - Use Humor; Personal Stories	√ - Personal Stories; Keep Quiet

Dilemmas, Strategies and Outcomes for Administrators: "You need to listen and pay attention."

Administrators described nine dilemmas, with only one being a shared dilemma. While all dilemmas will be described later in this chapter, here the primary focus is given to the single, common problem of limited parental involvement during ARD meetings. To assure consistency with information shared by the participants, it is important to note that the identified issue is parental involvement, not parental agreement. By this point it should be clear that ARD meetings have the potential to be battlegrounds for litigations, where words are weapons and the law can be used as a shield. In most battles, it is assumed that there is one winner and one loser. However, as communicated by administrators, their goal was not to win or lose. They sought to foster reciprocal understanding and collaboration so that all parties involved remain relatively unscathed, with their pride intact and their needs adequately met.

Dilemma: Limited Parental Participation

An important element to note is the administrators' perspective regarding the importance of parental participation as mentioned earlier in this chapter through their shared ideals and roles regarding ARD meetings. Hence the dilemma of parental involvement was not surprising. When asked during an interview, Adrian Archer provided a description of a parent that is actively involved in the ARD meeting:

> A parent who is knowledgeable about, um, schedules, courses, graduation plans, uh, life after high school that transition plan, um, somebody who asks questions when they they RR don't know what exactly the terminology may be or when you know there is conversations going on that she is not involved in. You know that a parent would, a knowledgeable parent, would interject and say, um, "What exactly does that mean?' and any type of parent participation other than that was deemed, "Semi-active."

These expectations demonstrate what Adrian defined as a model for parental involvement during ARD meetings. However, Jessica, the parent who is usually quiet, remained mostly quiet in the ARD meeting. Adrian, who valued more active participation, had an opportunity to facilitate the participation. Adrian identified the opportunity when he reflected on Jessica's silence, "I think she's kind of expecting us to fill her in as we go." Yet Adrian made a choice to not elicit more participation from Jessica. Thus, there is a contradiction between how Adrian valued and defined parental participation and the role Adrian played in a meeting where such participation was not facilitated.

In contrast, another administrator, Taylor Windham, seemed grateful for any level of parental participation as opposed to those parents who "…just show up" or are described as "checked out" during the ARD meeting. The ARD that was observed seemed to be an example of what Taylor described. The mother, Elaine Palmer, attended the ARD meeting and although she was not overtly participatory or verbal, she did pay attention to discussions and answered questions when asked. At the end of the ARD meeting Taylor told the mother, "I mean, when we have a parent that cooperates it really helps us." This statement can be interpreted in numerous ways, such as implying that only when parents cooperate does it help the school or that Taylor places greater value on cooperation than participation or that Taylor sees cooperation as key element of parental participation. However, Elaine accepted the statement as a compliment. Another administrator, Pat Wheeler, did not directly mention reduced parental involvement as a dilemma, as Pat sought input from the parents and did not allow minimal parental involvement to be an option. Therefore, unlike Adrian who saw an opportunity to facilitate participation and chose to ignore it, Pat was an active instigator for participation so that

the parents with whom Pat worked could express themselves, ask questions, and get involved in their children's educational programming.

Overall, all administrators unanimously communicated the high value of the parents' contributions. They also revealed consistency in their working knowledge of legal reasons for why parents should be involved in ARD meetings, yet their efforts, tools, and success in gaining parental involvement varied greatly. Not surprisingly, the strategies used by administrators in response to this dilemma were also something they had in common. The majority of administrators utilized the same discursive strategies in response to this dilemma: (a) Ask questions, (b) Check for understanding, (c) Rephrase information and (d) Wordsmithing. All of these strategies were utilized in an effort to increase parents' contributions during the ARD meeting, otherwise explained by administrator as "…bring 'em in and get 'em involved." Below are examples of these discursive strategies. Also included as a part of each example, when available, is the outcome of the dilemma, i.e., how the dilemma was resolved, if in fact it was resolved. While the majority of examples may seem to be self-explanatory, relevant background information is provided before each example, as needed.

Strategy: Ask Questions. Administrators used various types of questions, including yes/no questions, open-ended questions, and choice questions. The purpose was also diverse, which included seeking permission, verifying information, soliciting the parent's agreement, obtaining the parent's opinion and creating an opportunity for questions from the parent. In the following example, the mother had just requested that her child's case manager be changed. A child's case manager is a special education teacher at the child's campus who is assigned to oversee that child's program of services. In addition to their teaching assignment, duties of a case manager include sending relevant documentation to the parents and scheduling ARD

meetings. Following is an example of questioning being used to gain the permission of the parent:

> PAT: Okay. Uh, I think that either one is a definite possibility. Uh, I just can't make that commitment here in the ARD. We will- we will- we will look and try to honor that request but I can't commit to it in the ARD. Is that all right, ma'am?
>
> RUBY: Okay.
>
> PAT: And, and uh, we'll look at caseloads at the end of this year, okay?
>
> RUBY: I want Ms. Pitt or Ms. Rogers.
>
> PAT: Okay
>
> RUBY: Um-hm ((affirmative))
>
> PAT: I think that we can work that.

In this example, Pat's efforts to seek the mother's permission to handle her request in a later timeframe yielded Ruby's agreement after she had the opportunity to reiterate her request. While Pat did not fully commit to resolving the dilemma, Pat provided enough information assuring the handling of the dilemma in a mutually agreeable way that diminished any emergence of conflict around this issue. This example showed that Pat used questioning as a strategy to not resolve Ruby's dilemma but to postpone the resolution until later and obtain agreement from Ruby.

In another example, the exchange below demonstrates how an administrator used questioning to gain approval. For contextual purposes, persons in the room were having a casual conversation about pets and animals. Everyone except the administrator was either involved in the conversation or had attended to the conversation with verbal or non-verbal signals of attention such as laughing at appropriate times, making comments or looking at the person who

was talking. Just as the parent, Jessica Johnson, was finishing a story about an experience she had, Adrian Archer was somewhat abrupt and started the following exchange:

ADRIAN: We'll get another person and then we'll get started when Ms. Pitt gets back. Are y'all okay with that?

JESSICA: Yeah, we're entertaining ourselves with animals.

As Adrian did obtain permission through questioning, this strategy proved to successfully induce parental participation. However, there are two other features of this interaction that merit attention. First, while Adrian directed the question to the entire ARD committee, Jessica responded to the question, as if she was the representative of those who were informally chatting. This move can be seen as Jessica feeling agentic enough to respond for everyone. Although Jessica consistently reiterated that she does not usually get involved at ARD meetings, she was direct and quick in her reply to this question. Jessica's enthusiastic response and compliance demonstrated a sense of participation that is uncommon for her. Perhaps she cannot create an entry point into the technical aspects of the meeting but when it was casual conversations, she felt that she could create a space for herself and be more active. However, when Adrian evoked the administrator's authority position to start the meeting, she fell back into her usual role where she complied with authority and remained silent.

A second attention-worthy component of this exchange was Jessica's use of the personal pronouns *we* and *ourselves*. With this language, the mother seemed to address the administrator as an outsider, as she was not involved in the previous casual dialogue. However, her response can also be interpreted as an explanation or justification of why they were discussing things not related to the ARD meeting. In other words, Jessica's willingness to comply with a request made by an authority figure with the plural use of the term *we* demonstrates a sense of connection and

belongingness in the meeting with a level of comfort to engage in banter. If a parent feels comfortable enough with the members to engage in banter, then it is likely that the parent will remain open to suggestions made by the same members for her child's educational needs.

Moreover, Adrian's call to start the meeting is also aligned with the administrators taking on the role of being taskmasters. Recall it was mentioned earlier that administrators were concerned about the pressure on their time and resources and they did not like to spend a disproportionate amount of time on one student when they had many other students' needs to meet. Thus, Adrian's posturing as the meeting initiator is in alignment with being a taskmaster who is in charge of the meeting and being the lead communicator to keep things on schedule.

The next example is an illustration of how an administrator asked a question to verify the input of the parent and to circle back to an ongoing issue between the parent and the administrator to check for any flexibility in the parent's position. Before the ARD meeting began, there was casual conversation between the parent and school staff, during which one of the teachers asked the mother whether or not the child would be attending the meeting. The parent, Ruby, responded that the child would not be attending the meeting. As the ARD meeting began, following introductions and procedural statements, the first exchange between the administrator and the parent was as follows:

> PAT: …is it still your request that he not be a part of that?
>
> RUBY: I don't want him no part of the ARDs. He doesn't s- he doesn't seem to understand that it's for the best of him. He thinks he's doing something wrong. He doesn't need that pressure so I'd rather just eliminate it.
>
> PAT: Okay. I just wanted to verify that, thank you.

Ruby's feedback was gained through a single question that provided Ruby the opportunity to affirm the administrator's understanding. Despite Pat's effort to bring this topic to a close, dialogue regarding this topic continued for approximately 21 more exchanges, where Ruby had eight incidences of overlapped speech and Pat had two. Pat had seven repetitions and Ruby had none in this exchange. Ruby only tried to repair her sentences twice and Pat once. Neither of them interrupted anyone or used vocal fillers in this exchange. The outcome yielded the same result that included Pat pressing for the student to be a part of the ARD and Ruby providing reasons why she did not want her son to attend the meeting. Even though Ruby's response to the request was perhaps not the desired answer for Pat, given that Pat valued parental involvement, this strategy of engaging the parent yielded parental involvement, even if it did not yield parental agreement. It is to Pat's credit that Pat valued discursive involvement perhaps to build a relationship which had the potential to lead to some agreement in the future.

In addition to using questions for clarification of positions, providing choices was also a strategic move to encourage parental participation. In the dialogue below, the administrator presents the parent with choices through questioning. This is an excerpt from a lengthy debate amongst Pat, Ruby and Sarah Pitt, Jeremiah's new case manager, about sending documents home by mail versus sending the documents home with the child or the child's sibling:

PAT: Is it still all right if we send a copy home with him? That way we can kind of encourage that behavior. Or would you- do you not want that at all?

RUBY: I don't want it.

PAT: Don't want it.

RUBY: I don't want it because-

PAT: Okay.

RUBY: What if someone would have opened them?

PAT: And then found them- so-

SARAH: Okay.

PAT: So-

RUBY: You know and [then-

WHEELER: [We're gonna mail IEPs home and not-

SARAH: Everything.

RUBY: Everything.

PAT: And not send home a copy.

SARAH: No sending home a copy.

RUBY: Uh-huh ((affirmative))

By providing Ruby with two viable choices of action through questioning instead of only a strict agree or disagree option, Pat increased parental involvement and Ruby was able to meaningfully participate in the decision making at the ARD meeting. Additionally, in the excerpt above Ruby was able to express some of her needs and Pat was able to come to a resolution by being willing to listen to and agree to some of Ruby's requests. First Pat tried questioning to situate the issues that were of concern. Then Pat offered choices to Ruby that she might find acceptable and queried about those choices. Eventually, through an exchange and respect for Ruby's concern for confidentiality, they were able to come to a conclusion that seemed mutually agreeable.

Thus it seems that the administrators used questioning for various purposes. One reason for questioning was to verify previous positions of the parent to determine if the parent had changed her mind or not. Additionally, questioning was a strategy to inform the parent of choices and to elicit a conversation about choices to arrive at a shared agreement. Yet at other

times, questioning was used to elicit agreement with an authority figure and at other times questioning involved moving the conversation forward in the right direction, even if a resolution was unattained at the meeting.

By this point, the reader might note that some of the examples used in this section are common to the examples shared in previous section. This is done so that the reader can see that no conversation can be situated in a discursively fixed place. Meanings made out of discourses are varied and even within the same discourse, various positions can be taken, various interpretations made, and varying outcomes attributed. Therefore, the repeat of the same examples is intentional and not a reflection of a lack of raw data. Rather, by repeatedly using the same discourse, I am able to create multiple entry points to these discursive spaces where negotiations, agreements, and conflicts occur.

Strategy: Check for Understanding. Another strategy utilized by administrators was to check with the parent to confirm understanding. Following are two examples of this strategy, one being direct and one being implicative. In the direct example below the strategy is used explicitly:

ADRIAN: Do you understand what they're talking about in regard to?

JESSICA: Not really.

ADRIAN: Okay. If Jeremiah was to complete the program, whether it be this year or in preparation for next year,

JESSICA: Next year.

ADRIAN: The services that MHID could provide to him, um, because of- they have, um, they have day-hab and their hours run a certain amount of time and if he's gonna be on campus here we have to keep him so many hours a day and it's, uh, just kind of working

out what would be the best that for Jeremiah, if he would come here half a day and go there half a day or alternate because we have, um, an alternating schedule.

JESSICA: Um-hm ((affirmative))

ADRIAN: Like he doesn't meet all of his classes, um, today and then meet them again tomorrow. It'll rotate constantly so just, uh, trying to make that all fit for Jeremiah and what his services would look like.

JESSICA: Okay.

This is a transparent example of the strategy. Although it did not increase parental participation, in this situation the administrator's use of this technique did affect the parent's involvement. Providing Jessica with information enabled her to have more meaningful participation, as she could then agree or disagree based on her increased understanding. However, as Jessica tended to be agreeable, easily satisfied and hesitant about asking questions, it is reasonable to consider that her responses may have been similar regardless of the information provided to her.

Another use of the strategy occurred when the administrator questioned school staff. In this dilemma the ARD committee members were discussing Abel's reading level when one of his teachers stated that Abel was at reading level F. The administrator, Taylor Windham, responded to the teacher and asked, "Which is? For Mom or me?" to call for a clarification of the jargon. In other words, Taylor was aware that jargon such as reading levels is not commonly understood by people who are not educators, specifically reading teachers. As an observer, I too wondered what was meant by reading level. Thus, in an effort to be sure that Elaine had a clear understanding, Taylor expanded on the teacher's sentence about the student's reading level by requesting a definition of level F. In an effort to not single out Elaine as the only person who may not understand, Taylor's question started with the specification that the request was for the

parent, “Mom”, but ended by placing Taylor in the same position of not being clear about the terminology being used. This request was met with a definition, an example, and an analogy of the reading level provided by the teacher. During our interview Elaine communicated her appreciation for the administrator’s efforts:

ELAINE: Basically like they’re talking about it and another one talks about it and you know, like okay, they get it about what I’m trying to say and they answer my questions for me before I ever get there.

AMY: Ah.

ELAINE: So I was like you know, okay, that’s what I wanted to know.

AMY: So that worked for you, then?

ELAINE: Yes. Like when they (teachers) were talking about the- I guess the grade levels, like Taylor brought them down and was like grilling them for it. I was like, okay.

AMY: Like the grade level for writing?

ELAINE: I was like okay. I wasn’t basically understand what’s an F and what’s this and like-

AMY: Right, I remember that.

ELAINE: And I was like okay, “F” because my children tell me at home, “Oh, like I’m at a G” and my daughter is like “I’m at an L.” You’re telling me like I know this stuff. We didn’t have that when I was in school.

AMY: I did notice Taylor Windham said, “What is that?” What is an F for me and for Mom. I did hear that. So you were wondering the same thing?

ELAINE: Yes, like what’s an F. Yeah, so I was like, what? I mean, someone answered that question for me.

AMY: Before you could even ask it?

ELAINE: Yeah.

In the interview after this ARD meeting, Taylor explained, "I check for understanding....and I try to do that because the, um, a lot of times I know the parents aren't going to ask …" Taylor's effort to check for understanding, coupled with the intentional camaraderie with Elaine about clarifying information, yielded no increased participation from the parent during the meeting. While this effort seemed to please Elaine and answer her question, it did not propel her to participate in the meeting any differently, thus it did not resolve the administrator's dilemma of limited parent participation.

Strategy: Rephrase Information. Rephrasing information was another strategy used to address minimal parent participation. In interviews, the following comments were shared by administrators: "You have to be careful in the way those things are stated" and "I try to, you know, get the teacher to rephrase." Administrators applied this technique to ensure clarification of information shared. Demonstrations of this strategy include the following phrases said to parents: "It sounds like what they are doing and I- and I think that's gonna be- I think that should be a strategy that we continue to work on him take information that he reads" and "It sounds like we are opening the schedule." In these two statements the administrator referred to what the message "sounded like", which is an effort to remove authorship and provide an opportunity for the listener to concur with the administrator's interpretation. The more extensive example below included two points being alternately rephrased by Pat Wheeler:

PAT: I know that this was uh>>>, that Jack's not here right now but are we going to do any transition with him or is it still your request that he not be a part of [that?

RUBY: [I don't want him no part of the ARDs because of the fact that he gets anxiety attacks when we're talking about him.

PAT: [Okay.] I just wanted to verify that, thank you ma'am. I do think that a- that as we progress through high school that we try to get him comfortable with the ARD process.

RUBY: Uh-huh

PAT: Because later it's his process and not yours anymore, and we want to kind of prep him for that so I think that that's a goal that we need to work [toward].

RUBY: [I understand where you're coming from but the thing is that where he's at, he doesn't understand.

PAT: I understand.

RUBY: And I [and I've-we've] tried but we can try again and

PAT: [Yeah] [and just baby steps. I'm not talking about pushing him into the deep end and expecting him to swim.

RUBY: [Ok]

PAT: I'm just talking him to get comfortable talking about himself with other people is where I think would be a good goal [don't want] to force anything.

RUBY: [Okay]

At the end of the ARD meeting Pat again mentioned this topic by stating, "…just next year I would like to have a goal and we'll work on it next year of getting him into the ARD process…just a piece of it." Through rephrasing, the administrator sought the mother's approval for the student, Jack, to attend the ARD meeting, as well as her agreement to create a goal in order to accomplish this task. As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, Ruby and Pat

held different discursive positions on what was best for Jack. Pat's perspective stemmed from years of experience of working with similar students with special needs and Ruby's perspective stemmed from being able to understand Jack's needs in ways that no one else can, given that she is his mother. Yet Pat continued to circle back to this issue, echo his previous statements, and rephrase concerns and requests to hold his position firm – that Jack needs to attend the ARD meetings in some form or another and that should be a shared goal between the parent and the campus since the meeting is about Jack and not about Jack's mother, Ruby. It is noteworthy that both Pat and Ruby took several agreeable discursive positions by saying, "I agree," or "I understand," or "Okay," or simply by nodding heads. This type of interaction certainly implies active engagement and presence on both parties' parts.

However, caution should be taken in interpreting whether these agreeable discursive posturings were actual agreement or gestures made to move the conversation along. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in an interview with me following this ARD meeting, Ruby shared, "…I'll nod my head and say, but my opinion is as a parent it ain't gonna happen…" Therefore it can be determined that in this situation, this strategy engaged the parent; however, it did not yield resolution or bring forth an agreement between the parent and the campus staff.

A conversational move used by both administrators and parents that can be considered a form of rephrasing is labeled as *Same Page* for this study. This conversational move can be defined as sending the same verbal message multiple times using various words and phrases. Some readers may consider this conversational move to be the same as a technique referred to as *Broken Record*. However, the *Broken Record* technique is different because the speaker states the exact same words repeatedly and without variation. In an effort to differentiate, four

examples of this *Same Page* conversational move are shared below. All examples demonstrate a variation of the same message.

> ADRIAN: And we'll assist you with that….any support services you need…Okay, we'll look into everything we can do to support you…we'll look into assistance for you for that.
>
> PAT: We could do either one… we're committed to both programs...it may be more of one and less of the other…it sounds like we are opening the schedule…I want to say yes...there's always a chance of a singleton causing the problems that you are talking about, but I think we've got enough flexibility in the schedule to make this happen.

The compiled statements above from two administrators represent various discursive positions taken when dealing with parents. In Pat's case the statements reflect his interactions with Ruby regarding her request for a course for Jack. Adrian was using the *same page* technique in regard to Jessica's questions about graduation regalia and class ring, thus Adrian's use of this conversational move was blended with the role of provider. This move calls for the speaker to keep the listener on the same page as the speaker. This is done with the hope that repetitiveness will lead to understanding and possibly agreement. Therefore, Pat's move is seen as making a gesture of commitment and explaining that gesture through the *same page* move. Pat does this by first stating, "We're committed," then repeating, "I want to say yes," and repeating, "I think we've got enough flexibility in the schedule to make this happen." Pat's role in this exchange can be seen as a provider, negotiator, and a lead communicator. As a provider, Pat continued to offer options for Ruby and negotiated the feasibility of the options. Additionally, Pat also took charge of the communication where he was stating his position without expecting any agreement but being informative for Ruby's purposes. Adrian's *same page* move did not yield increased or

decreased participation. Jessica remained indifferent to Adrian's posturing. On the other hand, Pat's *same page* move increased participation because Ruby became engaged in a discussion to explore the options Pat presented.

It should be noted here that the outcome of increased or decreased participation is also contingent on the disposition of the parents and the state of mind with which they enter the ARD meeting. Jessica enters the ARD meeting with the disposition that the school is a stronger authority on her son than she is and if she asserts herself emphasizing that her son needs to stay in school longer, then she would be seen as a selfish parent. Moreover, Jessica is increasingly confused about the terms and policies used in the ARD meetings and services recommended for her son. Because of that reason, the only position where Jessica usually asserts herself is as a questioner, but she concedes immediately when an explanation is offered. Ruby, on the other hand, enters the ARD meeting seeing herself as an equally qualified expert on her son as any other person in the meeting. Therefore, she continued to assert her qualifications and Jack's best interest. Thus, out of the two participants, it is likely that a dilemma resolving strategy would engage Ruby more than it would Jessica. Elaine made a choice to remain mostly in silence so it is difficult to predict which strategy would engage Elaine further.

Strategy: Wordsmithing. Yet another strategy implemented by administrators in response to the dilemma of limited parental participation is labeled as *wordsmithing*. Speaking is an activity that most people do habitually and with limited attention to their word choice or the effect their words may have on others. In some extreme instances, what a person says can quite frankly be simply a stream of run-on sentences said with only the intention to hear him/herself speak. However, when the listener's response is negative or unexpected, the speaker may begin to repair their message through restatement, rephrasing, extended explanations or even an

apology. Wordsmithing seemed to be the administrators' attempt to avoid a need to recover from a negative exchange. For the purposes of this study, *wordsmithing* is defined as the intentional use of specific words to communicate a message to neutralize or reduce the impact of potentially negative content. Otherwise stated, *wordsmithing* is the use of words or phrases similar in meaning that carry the same message content without negative or confrontational connotation. One administrator described this technique in the following way:

> …something I work with the other administrator in ARDs is picking a hard word versus a soft word… if you are in a situation where you have a word that's hard, like directive or takes a stand where you have a choice with a soft word, sometimes you need to use the soft word. Sometimes you need to use the hard word if you are setting clear boundaries and it is interesting to watch people respond. You hear the hard word come out and you'll see them, you know, you see people visibly respond to the hard word versus the soft word.

This explanation implies an expanded vocabulary of synonyms as well as an awareness of the implications of certain words. Pat Wheeler explained that it is important for administrators to attend to "…crafting language to make it fit into the pieces of the ARD." Otherwise stated, this strategy requires both attention and intention: attention to the listeners and intention with word choice in an effort to influence the listeners' response.

An example of *wordsmithing* revolved around the term "push." Early in an ARD meeting, Pat Wheeler initiated the use of this word while offering an explanation to the parent. "I'm not talking about pushing him into the deep end and expecting him to swim." In this phrase the term was bracketed, if you will, by another term, "baby steps", used before the term "push" and then followed by the phrase, "…don't want to force anything." During the interview that

followed this ARD meeting, the term "push" was used by Pat numerous times without hesitation or bracketing as revealed in the following three statements:

- I pushed a little more about bringing the boy into the ARD - 'cause I felt that is important… I did have to push on that…one of the hardest things to deal with in this ARD specifically, and in general, is when a parent has a view that their child only functions at this certain level and to push them beyond that is somehow wrong.
- She started to go from "No," to, "Well, we'll see." I mean, I think that shows that she is thinking about it.
- Uh I admit I wasn't- I was little flat-footed and I didn't push at her at that moment so…
- That the administrator used this term repeatedly and without revision during the interview and only twice during the ARD meeting, protecting the term with "softer" words both before and after it, exemplifies *wordsmithing* as an intentional strategy.

In order to contextualize the following exchange in which *wordsmithing* occurred, Ruby had previously told the committee members that her son has anxiety about new activities that may be hard for him. Before the administrator could respond, a teacher assured Ruby that the "school staff would not push Jack."

RUBY: Yeah.

PAT: But we'll, we want to move him [forward.]

RUBY: [Forward.]

PAT: We don't want to *push* him forward but we want to *move* him forward.

In this excerpt the administrator's statement was a revision of the teacher's statement. Pat determined that the word *push* was too strong a term in this situation and chose to replace it with "…move him forward." So while the words changed, the intent of the message remained the

same: the school intends to take steps to assist the student in making progress toward more independence. Pat was quite deliberate in refusing to use the word *push* with Ruby, despite the lack of censorship around this word during the interviews. In this situation the strategy of *wordsmithing* proved to be successful. Although Ruby did not like the terminology of the message ("push"), the administrator was able to gain her agreement with the concept of the message regarding having her son learn to become more independent.

At another time, Taylor Windham explained how a potentially inflammatory statement from a teacher could be handled with *wordsmithing*:

> …a teacher may sometimes just say, 'Well, I think they're just being lazy' and you know and that- you know that, there lazy could have a different- 'We don't mean lazy' (pronounced *lay* with emphasis on the *z*) …you know maybe, 'reluctant to do the work because of frustration' and stuff.

In other words, Taylor recognized the undesirable connotation of the adjective *lazy* and anticipated that parents could have a negative reaction to their child being judged as such. In an effort to avoid such a situation that could lead to conflict, Taylor demonstrated intent to construct a phrase of different words to communicate the same message but without any overt notions of judgment. The administrator's re-crafted phrase also included a reason for the child's behavior, which has the potential to minimize criticism. This example is only one of many provided by the administrators. While other examples are not included here for the sake of brevity, the provision of specific examples implies the value and regular use of the strategy of *wordsmithing* by administrators.

Perhaps it is worth noting that an excerpt shared earlier in this chapter already demonstrated skillful *wordsmithing* by Pat when working with Ruby's request. Pat did not make

a commitment to Ruby but heard her concerns and placated Ruby with a “definite possibility.” Definite is an absolute term and possibility is a fleeting term. Combining something that is certain with something that is uncertain leaves the commitment ambiguous, giving the administrator some space to negotiate agreement and explore options to resolve the conflict. Pat’s ambiguous message, with the promise of a definite possibility, does not communicate agreement or commitment, and yet the message does not convey overt refusal. In response to this use of *wordsmithing,* Ruby verbally accepted Pat’s response, which can be left open to interpretation.

Wordsmithing then becomes an essential skill for administrators to master in order to prevent conflicts before they even arise. Using soft words, rephrased words, and being mindful of implied or overt connotations, administrators could generate a respectful discursive space with the parents from where collaborative agreements can be imagined.

The focus of this chapter thus far has been on dilemmas and strategies identified by the parents and the administrators. However, before proceeding with a discussion of which interactional strategies utilized were effective, it is important to note that the findings revealed one circumstance that proved to be a dilemma for both parents and administrators: limited parental involvement during ARD meetings. Although parents did not specifically describe this as a dilemma, other experiences they depicted can be considered as contributing factors to their minimal involvement in ARD meetings or the perception of such. The following statements from parents exemplify their perspectives about being involved in the ARD meetings:

- Why have me here? Just to sign a piece of paper?
- I don't know what's, what's going on, you know?
- I don't know what's going to happen on the next meeting.

- I don't know. Whoever the person is that was in there, you know, she's the only one that knows.
- Basically I agreed with everything they said today so why not sign it, you know.
- …they're like well, we're gonna do this and we're just gonna leave it there, like they basically last time they didn't change nothing….they just left it the same as the year before.
- So I don't know. I got to talk to that lady, though, because I need to know why…
- They didn't say, so I don't know.

Based on these statements, it can be concluded that having limited involvement in ARD meetings was a dilemma for the parents. While there was only one mutual dilemma, multiple discursive strategies were used by both parents and administrators to address it. Table 10 summarizes the variety of strategies utilized by parents and administrators. While it is interesting to note which strategies the two groups shared, there were differences in strategies between the two groups, too. For example, no administrator used storytelling, humor, ultimatums or face-to-face-appeasement. Parents did not draw out opposition or maximize.

Table 10

Comparison of Discursive Strategies

Discursive Strategy	Parent Ruby	Parent Jessica	Parent Elaine	Admin. Adrian	Admin. Pat	Admin. Taylor
Ignore speaker; continue topic	√					
Storytelling	√	√	√			
Agree then refute	√				√	
Humor to diffuse or change topic	√	√				
Ultimatum	√					
Face-to-face appeasement/agreement coupled with internal dissent	√	√	√			
Maximum/extensive explanation				√	√	
“Thank you” to change topic/end an exchange	√			√	√	
Agree then suggest					√	√
Interruption	√			√	√	
Overlap speaking; word anticipation	√				√	√
Draw out vocal opposition and address directly					√	
Advocate for the opposition; unite against “the system”	√				√	√
State expectation, gain input from others then compromise	√				√	
Seek credibility and/or defer responsibility elsewhere	√		√	√	√	

Although not true of each time they were utilized, overall the strategies used by administrators did yield increased parental participation in a way that was valued by the administrators. This increased involvement, albeit various types and amounts, led to a successful resolution of administrators' dilemma of limited parental participation. There were five additional dilemmas described by administrators, although not mutually shared. These included:

- School staff not being prepared for the ARD meeting
- Anticipation of litigation based on parent's history with the district
- A parent possibly being intimidated and overwhelmed by the use of educational jargon
- Rushing through information and the inefficient use of time during an ARD, which included waiting for it to begin and sidebar conversations during the meeting.

Table 11 lists dilemmas shared by administrators, as well as discursive strategies and/or conversational moves utilized in response to the dilemma.

Table 11

Dilemmas and Responses of Administrators

Dilemmas	Adrian	Pat	Taylor
Unprepared; purpose of ARD meeting not accomplished	√ Ask Questions; Create Plan; Maximize		
Time off task	√ Interrupt; Ask Questions		√ Ask Questions
Competing attention of campus needs versus ARD meeting needs	√ Interrupt; End Conversations; Change Topic		
No-show parents; limited parent input	√ Ask Questions; Check for Understanding; Rephrase	√ - Ask Questions; Check for Understanding; Rephrase; Wordsmithing	√ Check for Understanding; Solicit Parent Opinion/Response
New, unexpected information	√ - Ask Questions; Create a Plan		
Parent does not ask questions when administrator believes they should do so or want to do so	√ Ask Questions		√ Ask Questions; Check for Understanding; Solicit Parent Opinion/Response
History with parent suggests potential litigation	√ -Check for Understanding	√ - Wordsmithing; Rephrase; Maximize; Negotiate	
Use of jargon			√- Check for Understanding; Rephrase
Parent seems intimidated			√ - Check for Understanding; Rephrase
Rushing through information			√ - Ask Questions; Check for Understanding; Rephrase
Parent disagrees with recommendation	√ - Rephrase; Ask Questions	√ - Wordsmithing; Rephrase; Create a Plan; Circle Back; Maximize; Negotiate	

AIDA: Situated Ideals and Recommended Action

The purpose of ARD meetings is to provide an opportunity for all required members of the ARD committee to participate in a collaborative manner to develop the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) through mutual agreement. This can be accomplished through sharing ideas, providing equal consideration of various types and sources of information, placing mutual value on the input of each required member, collective problem identification and collaborative problem solving. As participants in the ARD process, parents and administrators have the opportunity to take intentional discursive actions to achieve ideals that honor these expectations as well as their own. In order for ARD meetings to reflect the aims of the practice, to accomplish legal expectations, and to achieve what participants consider the epitome of successful ARD meetings, there is a need for discursive ideals and identified ways that dilemmas should be handled at ARD meetings.

The tenets of AIDA require a process of self-reflection to identify conceptual ideals that could be imagined for mitigation and management of conflict. These ideals can be informed by the power of personal choice as well as the contradictory goals of the participants. In other words, contradictions could occur on many levels, such as a contradiction between what one says and what one does (intrapersonal), a contradiction of each party wanting something different (intrapersonal) and the risk of incongruity between what is needed, what is wanted and what is received, as seen in various examples presented in this chapter. Conceptual ideals must also take into account that there will be instances where the aims of participants may sometimes be at odds with the aims of the practice itself. Based on the dilemmas, participants' negotiations of the dilemma, and ideals presented by the participants, the following section aligns with the guidelines of Grounded Practical Theory (GPT) and Action Implicative Discourse Analysis by

offering a conceptualized set of abstracted ideals that could minimize conflict for participants in an ARD meeting. The phrasing of the recommendations below is informed by the tenets of GPT.

Contextual Empathy

Considering the perspective of others includes acknowledging the context in which they interact with the student in question. Parents should realize that administrators typically do not have the same depth of care nor the multitude of experiences that they do as parents. Likewise, administrators should recognize and respect that parents' context involves the life of the student before they, as administrators, got the opportunity to work with the student. Administrators should attend to the input of parents and realize that while this may be ARD number 500 in their career, it is the parent's unique child for whom decisions are being made. As a result, administrators should not be routine in words, actions, or procedures. Concerns of parents and administrators do typically coincide regarding the student's future. Although both groups want the student to be successful, their interpretations of success can be different. Therefore it is key for parents and administrators not to interact based on the pre-determination that one perspective is more important than another. Acknowledging the contributions of others can be demonstrated by not interrupting, speaking over or ignoring the person sharing. Thus, contextual empathy is the recommendation that calls for understanding the contextual details of someone with whom one is in conflict and putting oneself in the other person's context. It is only then that one can generate empathy for a position different from one's own and appreciate the contextual limits and possibilities of the other party's position.

Optimistic Presumption

Expecting positive outcomes despite previous negative experiences can be a challenge. The state of mind with which one enters the ARD meetings has a direct influence on how one

behaves in the meeting, thereby influencing the outcome of the meeting. In an ARD meeting there should no assumption that the other party is on a fault-finding mission. Such assumptions start the meeting with a conflict-driven state of mind and make it difficult to identify shared grounds from where dialogues can occur. Thus, in keeping the student and his/her special needs as the primary focus, parents should presume that ARD meeting procedures are legally compliant and remain open to solutions instead of problems. Administrators have nothing to gain by being non-compliant. Additionally, parents will benefit from abandoning the stance of being a victim of the school's malicious efforts to minimize services, a state of mind that is harmful for all involved. Administrators should optimistically presume that parents want to know the reasoning behind their recommendations and not always for litigation purposes, yet another state of mind that is harmful for all involved. In general, people do not like what they do not understand. Thus, administrators need to provide explanations to parents with the expectation that parents, while they may not agree, can appreciate the opportunity to learn the purpose of such proposals. Thus, optimistic presumption is the premise that both parents and administrators should enter the meeting in an optimistic state of mind, with only one presumption: that they are committed to working collaboratively and not combatively to find solutions for a student with disabilities. This presumption requires that parents abandon the stance of being a victim or positioning themselves in opposition to administration, and requires that administrators abandon the fear of litigation which creates the perception that the parents are contentious. While there are always exceptions where the most positive outlook could still result in unresolved conflict, there should be no reason to start negotiating from that position of difference and expect a positive outcome. A key element to this kind of optimistic presumption is an establishment of trust and relationship building between all stakeholders.

Amenable Uncertainty

It is unlikely that any party in the ARD meetings would be informed with all the necessary details as an expert for all areas of information connected to the meeting. An understanding of this uncertainty can open up generosity in spirit to engage in a collaborative dialogue. Additionally, in a meeting where people are passionate about exploring best options and hold strong positions, they can appear to be intense in their expression and sometimes exhibit raw emotions. It is better to not misinterpret the emotional intensity as something adversarial but to explore the reasons for the emotions to learn the critical aspect that is affecting the issue. The tenet of this recommendation is that there is no certainty in any kind of understanding and to function effectively as a team, there has to be an openness to exploring questions and learning together through dialogue, understanding, and generosity of spirit.

It is important to recognize that not having all of the answers creates learning opportunities for all persons involved. To not be intimidated by the knowledge of others is as important as it is to not intimidate others with information. Both parents and administrator have specialized knowledge that others do not have. Thus there is a choice to make regarding whether or not to share that information. Likewise, there is always a choice to ask questions when unsure about information or the reasoning behind a recommendation or decision. It is neither constructive nor useful to rely on inference or assumptions of others in order for a message to be understood. Parents and administrators should communicate directly by asking questions, responding honestly, and willingly sharing information so that all parties can have the same knowledge when conferring about recommendations.

Unpretentious Assertiveness

Finding a comfortable position between assertiveness and flexibility is an individualized task that requires a balance of acting on known information, requesting information and relying

on others for information. In other words, it is important to not engage in an "all or nothing" or "my way or the highway" stance. Just as asking questions should not imply stupidity, sharing distinctive information should not suggest omnipotence. Parents and administrators know what they know, but both groups should also recognize that there is more, sometimes crucial, information to be gained through collaboration with each other.

Action Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA) yields actions that can be taken by participants within a practice, which for this study is the ARD meeting. Thus, in summarizing the verbs of the ideals listed above, it is recommended that parents and administrators work to eliminate judgment, acknowledge others, ask questions, expect compliance, empathize with others, attend to information, respond honestly, prioritize the purpose of the ARD, communicate directly and understand how discourse impacts consensus.

For the purposes of this study, effective strategies are those that yielded an outcome that reflected the ideals of participants. On the following page, Table 12 summarizes discursive strategies and conversational moves utilized by parents and administrators. This table also indicates whether or not the strategy or conversational move proved to be useful in achieving the user's ideal. Reviewing the information in the table, it is notable that no strategy that was used by parents and administrators proved successful for one and not the other. Also, the consistency between achieving ideals and the strategy being effective did not seem to be coincidental, revealing that parents and administrators considered a dilemma successfully resolved if it enabled them to achieve their situated ideal. In other words, failure to achieve ideals was one way that participants defined dilemmas, although not directly communicated in that way by any participant.

Through purposeful reflection of their discourse during ARD meetings, parents and administrators can make choices about their communicative content and conduct. Parents and administrators can choose to modify discursive elements such as the following: (a) word choices, (b) discursive strategies and (c) speech acts. While Table 12 addresses discursive strategies, Table 13 delineates specific speech acts, their frequency and their functions, as determined from the data analysis. Thus for clarification of interpretation, interruption was used the most by Elaine Palmer, but it was done during the interview with the researcher, and not during the ARD meeting. In considering frequency alone, it can be determined that Ruby Williams put forth more effort for the purpose of controlling while the administrator in her ARD meeting, Pat Wheeler's frequency indicates higher frequency of efforts to clarify information. With increased awareness and intent, these acts and discursive strategies can become tools of resolution for parents and administrators alike.

Table 12

Discursive Strategies and Conversational Moves

Strategy or Conversational Move (P) used by Parent (A) used by Administrator	Overall Outcome(s)	Parents' Ideals Reflected	Administrators' Ideals Reflected	Effective Strategy For User
1.Storytelling (P)	No empathy noted in discourse or demeanor of listener	No	NA	No
2. Ask Questions (P)(A)	Gained parental involvement; received information	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. Make Requests (P)	Request considered	Yes	NA	Yes
4. Check for Understanding (A)	Gained parental response	NA	Yes	Yes
5. Give Ultimatums (P)	Acknowledgement of information	No	NA	No
6. Keep Quiet (P)	Questions asked & answered on parent's behalf; questions unasked; reduced parental input; listeners response based on individual interpretation	No	No	No
7. Rephrase Information (P) (A)	Multiple opportunities to communicate the same message	Yes	Yes	Yes
8. Disagree (P)	Extensive explanation provided	No	NA	No
9. Use Humor (P)(A)	Represented control of dialogue; signaled change of topic	No	No	No
10. Maximized replies to dissent (A)	Listener gained information and insight about recommendation	NA	Yes	Yes
11. Wordsmithing (A)	Increased acceptance; decreased tension	NA	Yes	Yes
12. Give and Take; agree then refute (A)(P)	Acknowledgement of others; compromise	Yes	Yes	Yes
13. Circle Back (P)(A)	Reiteration of speaker's point	No	No	No
14. Hold others accountable (P)(A)	Explanations/excuses provided; mutual awareness of needs	Yes	Yes	Yes

15. Negotiate (A)	Increased input of others; reached compromise	NA	Yes	Yes
16. Directly address verbalized and suspected issues (A)	Acknowledgement of concerns; created opportunity for collaboration	NA	Yes	Yes
17. Same Page (P)(A)	Reiteration of speaker's point; increased opportunity to have message heard	Yes	Yes	Yes
18. Use Discourse Markers (A)(P)	Gain attention; clarity of intention	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 13.

Counts of Speech Acts During ARD Meetings

Speech Act	Function	Parents	Administrators
Interruption	Respond to message at beginning of sentence or phrase, initiate closure of topic, ask question, initiate turn to speak	Ruby: >127 Jessica: >66 Elaine: 53	Adrian: 1 Pat: >52 Taylor: 35
Repetition	Reiterate a point, extend speaker's turn, maintain attention on speaker, demonstrate spontaneous thought	Ruby: 21 Jessica: 36 Elaine: 10	Adrian: 20 Pat: 142 Taylor: 19
Filled Pause	Sustain attention, sustain speaker's turn, create time to think, hesitation before commitment	Ruby: 3 Jessica: 77 Elaine: 9	Adrian: 76 Pat: 81 Taylor: 98
Overlapping Speech	Complete speaker’s statement, interrupt, demonstrate knowledge, rush to turn for self, dismiss information, take control of conversation	Ruby: >80 Jessica: 3 Elaine: 9	Adrian: 2 Pat: >67 Taylor: 12

Discussion: It Takes Two To Tango

In this section I discuss the overall findings of the study by connecting it to a metaphor. In order to reveal the insights discovered through my study I evoke the metaphor of dance to create a deeper understanding of how similar to a dance the processes of negotiations are in an ARD meeting. Due to both the sensitivity of subject matter and the sometimes vast difference between perspectives, discourse between parents and administrators during ARD meetings can become intense and contentious. When attempting to tease out culpability for such discord, the adage "It takes two to tango" comes to mind. In addition, in an earlier section in chapter two the metaphor of dance was used to explain discourse. Therefore, building on a previously used metaphor, dance and discourse require two people to be inextricably linked and neither can take place unless relevant parties are actively and intentionally involved. Similar to the synchronous coordination needed between dance partners in order for their performance to be successful, collaboration between parents and administrators is needed to elicit mutually beneficial outcomes at an ARD meeting. For example, when Elaine Palmer disagreed with having her son Abel removed from classroom instruction for 30 minutes of counseling twice a week, the administrator, Taylor, empathized with her and acknowledged that could be too much of a reduction in instruction. Taylor then asked Elaine her opinion about Abel receiving 15 or 20 minutes of counseling twice a week, to which Elaine agreed. This demonstrated that when the needs and preferences of parents and administrators are acknowledged, then both parties gain a better understanding of each other's context and arrive at an agreeable position. When such understanding is combined with trust, much like the relationship between two dancers, where movement is coordinated through leading and following, trusting the quality of guidance, a collaborative creation happens.

Another quality of both dance and discourse is spontaneity. To prevent injury and imbalance, the dancer who follows must be able to respond to the spontaneous actions of their partner, who leads. An example of spontaneity from discourse comes from the first ARD meeting held for Ruby Williams and her son Jack. After the meeting started, Ruby interrupted the proceedings by announcing that she had not received requested documents before the meeting. She then said, "Then there's no meeting…. I'm cancelling." Although surprised by this extemporaneous outburst, the administrator, Pat Wheeler, responded by not arguing. As a result, Ruby walked out of the meeting room. Even though Ruby's response did not contribute to consensus in this situation, Pat's reaction was intuitive and immediate. In this case Ruby took a lead in how the dance should proceed, which is to have no dance at all unless she trusted the necessary elements were present for a proper dance. This was an unexpected, spontaneous move for Pat to witness. Pat could follow Ruby in numerous ways. One such way would be to run after Ruby and persuade her to attend the meeting. Another move would be to reflect on the situation and follow Ruby's spontaneous lead and terminate the meeting until all desired elements are present for the discursive dance. Pat chose the latter.

Partner sensitivity and connections are also elements of both dance and discourse that can contribute to mutual success. In an ARD meeting, one way that connections can be made is through restatement, which conveys attention and responsiveness to information. For example, after Ruby shared that Jack has anxiety Pat said, "Don't want to make anybody sick or anxiety. I know I used to- used to throw up all the time over school so I understand the anxiety over school…. anxiety seems to be an iss- a big issue that we're hearing and we won't go beyond any limit." Just as dance partners are not just partners to execute movements but partners who understand each other's strengths and weaknesses and sensibilities, which reflect the ways in

which they execute a harmonious series of movements on the dance floor, parents and administrators need to be sensitive to the sensibilities of each party. For instance, if parents and administrators could build a relationship with each other they would become aware of each other's trigger points. For example, a parent might be heavily triggered by the mention of counseling, as she might have had negative experiences and might need some assurance from administrators about some options should she or her child have another negative experience. On the other hand, administrators might be extremely sensitive to parents evoking the notion of compliance every instance that they are unhappy. The threat of impending litigation is not the best building block for a collaborative relationship. Then administrators might be less inspired to demonstrate empathy and more inspired to robotically comply, an undesirable outcome for all involved.

The discussion thus far focused on exploring discourse through the lens of the dance. Mostly the ideas of the dance presented were those that focused on harmonious, collaborative movement across the floor. However, ARD meetings are contentious, full of tensions and contradictory feelings, while moving the conversation forward in a direction on which all parties can agree. This understanding of the ARD meetings is remarkably similar to how tango, especially Argentine Tango, is conceptualized.

There are multiple versions of the tango, including the American Tango, the International Tango and the Argentine Tango. Both the American and International Tango are dances typically associated with formal competitive ballroom dancing (Rasche, 2007). The Argentine Tango, however, is considered a more informal, social dance. The Argentine Tango and dilemmatic discourse between parents and administrators at ARD meeting share many characteristics, as they both engage their participants in an emotional state of mind and are both

grounded in a state of tension. Just as the tango involves physical tension, ARD meetings can be emotionally intense, where each party holds onto their positions. As with most practices, the more experience a person has the easier it can be to participate in the practice, thus some parents and administrators are better at resolving dilemmas through discourse than others. This was evidenced in the study, as the administrator with the most experience, Pat Wheeler, identified the least number of dilemmas and demonstrated the largest repertoire of interactional strategies. Just as in dancing, some participants have a natural propensity for involvement, some need a strong lead in order to feel comfortable participating, and others prefer to watch instead of participate. In this study all three types of involvement were demonstrated. One parent, Ruby, and one administrator, Pat, both displayed a natural proclivity for engaging in discourse regarding dilemmas, while the parent Elaine Palmer and administrator Adrian Archer preferred to be observers who engaged in conversation only when requested. Although neither was new to the ARD process, both Jessica and Taylor seemed to be most comfortable in following the lead of others. Thus another parallel that can be drawn between the tango and dilemmatic discourse is the variety of experiences that transpire throughout each process for each participant.

Argentine tango is a dance performed with intention, passion, emotion, and concentrated efforts that are meant to move two people toward a common goal. Much like the dialogue of an ARD meeting, the tango relies on improvisation. Sometimes described as creative discovery, dance partners focus on each other, as every move in a tango is based on leading and following. Discourse surrounding dilemmas at ARD meetings mirrors such movements, as parents and administrators act and counteract reactively. An example of this is the conversation between Ruby Williams and Pat Wheeler mentioned earlier in this chapter as they discussed having Jack, Ruby's son, join the ARD meeting. Over the course of 12 exchanges, Ruby and Pat agreed,

disagreed, empathized, reiterated, restated, compromised, and agreed again. Thus, Ruby and Pat situated themselves in many discursive positions. Similar to how a tango is a series of responses as partners connect with each other, versus a choreographed performance (Rasche, 2007), the choices that parents and administrators make in their spontaneous responses to each other cannot be pre-determined or planned but can only be experienced through performance, through situating oneself in many discursive positions, through working out tensions, navigating the discursive floor, trusting and developing a relationship. Such a relationship is neither homogenous nor stable, but rather one that varies based on actors and their needs for desired outcomes.

As dance partners instinctively translate music into movement, tangos are intensely emotional dances covering a wide terrain. Likewise, parents and administrators create their discourse by translating emotions and ideas into words based on their instinct and experience. An example of this was found in the individual interviews with parents Jessica Johnson and Elaine Palmer. Each mother expressed her emotions during the interview by stating, "How did I feel? Kind of- not angry, but maybe I didn't understand, you know," and "I was kinda upset when the teachers kept on just like when they were saying about my son." Both parents shared that they did not express this emotion during their ARD meeting but offered different reasons for making that choice. Jessica blamed herself for not understanding, while Elaine handled her emotion by talking to herself as she explained "…calm, just be quiet just do what you gotta do for, right, your son." Had these mothers revealed their emotions during their ARD meetings, discussions and outcomes may have been different. While both mothers had an emotional reaction to the events that occurred in the ARD meeting, they reacted differently, they situated

themselves at different discursive positions, and they followed a different lead, but the dance was still emotive, still full of tension, still with a commitment to move forward.

Changes made in discourse regarding intention, timing, and content can be compared to variations in the tango that are determined by the speed, timing, and music. Otherwise stated, the flow of the dance is dictated by bodily communication, just as the flow of the ARD meeting is dictated by verbal communication. In Argentine Tango, partners are expected learn each other's tensions while holding each other, know how to lead and follow, and know the meaning of each movement, whether it is embedded in tension or in an intent to come to a place of agreement. These movements occur while the partners navigate the dance floor, much like the participants in an ARD meeting. Due to the unpredictability in the ARD meeting, it is difficult to offer any prescriptive training of what a parent should do or what an administrator should say. However, for a smooth glide across the floor, i.e., for moving forward, both the parents and the administrators would need to be able to demonstrate flexibility in responding to changes and unpredictable directions while keeping the goal of the student's best interest in focus.

For instance, in her second ARD meeting, Ruby Williams was adamant that both IEPs and report cards be mailed home instead of being sent home with her son Jack. The administrator, Pat Wheeler, agreed to comply with her demand. However, Pat then coupled a suggested change with reasoning by asking Ruby if the report card could be sent home with Jack so as not to "set him apart because all the other students are gonna have a copy of their report card." Ruby immediately changed her mind and approved of Jack bringing his report card home. This is an example of how the direction of the discourse changed from refusal to agreement within two verbal exchanges. While both the tango and the ARD meeting have a basic structure of a beginning, middle and end, they both involve situational decision making as partners take

one responsive step at a time. Through these steps, whether in a dance or in a discourse, partners collaboratively create the practice. Without coordination between partners, a person's toes can get stepped on, literally and figuratively. Broken toes could lead to lawsuits, an undesirable outcome for all.

Depicted by some as walking with a partner to music, the basic components of the Argentine Tango include the embrace, the walk and figures (Rasche, 2007). Forms of these components can be seen in discourses in ARD meeting, as parents and the administrators can be seen as conversational partners connected through discourse. How partners stay connected in the tango is referred to as the embrace, which can be open or closed. In the open embrace of the tango, dance partners maintain space between them with somewhat rigid frames, demonstrating that there is palpable tension. Similarly, in an ARD meeting parents and administrators often display rigidity in their discursive positions, even if they are expected to be in some sort of partnership. Even in open embrace, partners hold their frame much like the parents and administrators in the ARD meetings. Even though the two parties are supposed to be in some kind of relationship, they represent their position--frame their position--which creates the tension between the two parties, similar to that which can be seen exhibited by dance partners in an open embrace. Especially when in the ARD meetings exchanges are long and parents and administrators occupy multiple discursive positions and yet operate from their own rigid framing of the issues, such posturing can be similar to the open frame in Argentine Tango. Of more importance is that the visual in the Argentine Tango demonstrates two people looking forward, separated by the distance of their arms, holding their posture and position firm. And yet, all it would take is letting go of the posture and position and the open embrace can move to a close embrace.

In the closed embrace of the tango, partners are physically close to each other, denoting an intimacy, a relationship that allows them to move more fluidly in unison. This movement does not imply a lack of tension or lack of frame and posture. Instead, this movement takes into consideration both people's frame and posture while they invest in building a closed embrace relationship while moving through the dance floor harmoniously. The closed embrace of the tango is described by Rasche (2007) as "…close but not intrusive….familiar but not intimate whereby the intimacy is one of communication and understanding" (p. 3). Similarly, in an ARD meeting, when administrators and parents work together, it does not imply that they have given up their vested interest of the discursive positions that they occupy. In other words, just because a parent chooses to work with an administrator does not imply that she has abandoned her perspectives on what she deems is best for her child. On the other hand, just because an administrators chooses to work with and listen to the parent's concerns does not imply that the administrators will somehow abandon their responsibilities, ignore compliance issues, and consider the parent as the only expert in the room.

But like a closed embrace, both parents and the administrators, when working well together, demonstrate a trust-based relationship where they are free to express and respond to each other's subtle and not-so-subtle moves, leading to fewer arguments, open discussions, and an increase in emotional intimacy. Rasche (2007) explains that in the tango, "Subtleties and interpretation out-speak strength and speed" (p. 3), which could also be said about the discourse that surrounds dilemmas at ARD meetings. It is the covert messages that are recognized and then understood through interpretation that can, if attended to, influence both the flow and the outcome of discussions more so than overt, content-neutral messages. Subtle messages lead to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Thus, being able to communicate these missed

understandings can create an awareness of and respect for each other's positions, as happens in both tango and ARD meetings where dilemmas are minimized. Proliferation of such awareness and responsiveness can produce a closer connection between partners, which in turn can yield more unified progress.

The walk of the Argentine Tango describes how partners move from place to place. The walk in the tango can be parallel, crossed, or a promenade. Walking parallel in the tango has been described as walking the same direction using the same foot, but with one dance partner stepping forward and one partner stepping backward (Racshe, 2007). Walking in a crossed pattern in the tango occurs when both the partners continue to move in the same direction, but they step with the opposite foot as one person moves forward and one person moves backward. In ARD meetings, the same movement in one direction can be accomplished when parents and administrators are willing to acquiesce to the person leading the conversation, trusting that overall progress can occur when each partner is willing to move backward as well as forward. When both parents and administrators contribute to an ARD meeting with a sense of forward and backward movement that they accept with grace, trust flows easier and runs smoother than meetings where neither party is willing to move. The promenade walk in the tango occurs when partners walk forward, side-by-side while facing the same direction. When both the parents and administrators reciprocated support and moved on the same course toward the mutual goal of meeting the needs of the student, a promenade walk occurred to occupy agreeable discursive positions. When people walk side by side, in the same direction, there is a sense of achieving something together, moving forward, sharing the same destination. A promenade walk in an ARD meeting would refer to the parties invested in the same goals, moving in the direction of

achieving the goals together, and stepping in unison toward the goal while negotiating each step carefully to ensure forward movement.

While there are numerous figures involved in the tango, three main categories are crosses, circular movements and foot play. Cross steps involve a person crossing one foot in front of the other, sometimes in place and other times moving forward or backward. Similarly, parents and administrators can switch the focus of discourse by changing their communicative priorities, which results in the conversation moving forward, backward or becoming stagnant. Circular movements in the tango occur one of three ways: one person standing still while their partner moves around him or her, one person spinning the other person, or both partners making a half turn forward or backward. Regardless of the version, circular movements cause a change in the partners' positions relative to each other. Likewise, conversations during an ARD meeting that involve extended turns revolving around a single topic can cause a shift in the outlook, opinion or attitude of each partner.

"Foot play" is the term used to describe foot movements that partners can perform during the tango (Racshe, 2007). Some of the names of these moves include dragging, pedaling, traps, pushes, catches, stops and the sandwich. Forgoing a description of each, these steps are used to make the tango exciting for onlookers and unpredictable for dancers. Foot play can also be done to intentionally challenge the dance partner and force a response. When conversational partners in ARD meetings oppose each other, make accusations, erroneously interpret data, give ultimatums, or refuse to consider information rather than accept the unpredictability and work with the challenges, the dance halts. In an ARD meeting, conversational moves such as ultimatums and echo can be confrontational and typically require the other person to respond. For example, Ruby's ultimatum of "I want Pitt or Ms. Rogers" when discussing her request to

change Jack's case manager was met with Pat's response of "Okay. I think we can work that." Just as dance partners' reactions to an unplanned move in the tango lead to new actions, the response of parents and administrators to discursive deployments resulted in a chain reaction of reciprocal challenges and responses. While not necessarily as exciting for other members of the ARD committee as it may be for those watching a tango, such actions tend to elicit a response from conversational partners. Exchanges such as these contribute to the shape of the dance as a whole, just as a discursive performance, if you will, contributes to the outcomes of ARD meetings.

As previously mentioned the tango is made up of a blend of foot play, figures and walks that result in a unique dance performance. The situation at ARD meetings involves the merging of five discursive positions: (a) what the parent believes the school is doing, (b) what the parent believes the school should be doing, (c) what the administrator believes the school is doing, (d) what the administrator believes the parent should be doing and (e) what is actually occurring. The root of dilemmas seemed to be based on the difficulty that comes with blending these perspectives. In other words, as each participant may struggle with incongruity between *what is* and *what should be* based on their perspectives, the additional level of comparison between these perceptions and the documented reality of what is actually occurring creates more opportunity for conflict.

While there are similarities between the Argentine Tango and discourses in an ARD meeting, no metaphor is a perfect fit and there are ways in which tango is not entirely similar to discourses in ARD meetings. In the tango, one person leads while the other follows, whereas in ARD discourse, the ideal is for parents and administrators to take turns leading and following. Additionally, ARD meetings are formal processes, while the Argentine Tango is considered an

informal, social dance. The tango can be performed to various types of music, which influences the flow, speed, and style of the dance. An ARD meeting, however, is typically regimented by an agenda, which yields a mostly predictable pace–unless, of course, a parent storms out of the meeting. Tango begins only when both partners are mutually prepared as they willingly step onto the dance floor, equally equipped to master their performance. An ARD meeting, however, can begin without parents and administrators being likewise prepared or even aware of what each other may be contemplating. This was established when Ruby Williams stood up and walked out of her first ARD meeting. The administrator and campus staff had not expected that to happen. During the interview Pat, the administrator, admitted to being, "…a little flat-footed", implying surprise by Ruby's abrupt exit. As soon as Ruby closed the door Pat said, "And we're done." Pat's statements demonstrated a reaction to the unexpected that involved compliance and acceptance. Unlike the tango that ends when the music stops, an ARD meeting can end when consensus is gained regarding all decisions, when agreement cannot be reached, or when the parent walks out of the meeting. Last, and perhaps most poignantly, a key difference is the purpose of the two events. While both the tango and an ARD meeting are activities that participants choose to take part in, the tango is a performance done for the pleasure of the participants as well as observers. Additionally, the tango seemingly provides physical benefit for its participants, entertainment for its observers and an energizing experience for both groups. ARD meetings, on the other hand, are held to serve the needs of a person who may not be a part of the event, i.e., the student. They also involve no external observers, can be emotionally draining, and have no overt benefit other than the potential for personal fulfillment based on contributing to the educational success of a child.

Summary

Discourse at ARD meetings can be a source of satisfaction, frustration, or empowerment. In this chapter I shared ideals related to ARD meetings as identified by parents and administrators. I also revealed dilemmas that were encountered by participants as well as discursive strategies and conversational moves utilized to manage those dilemmas. The outcomes of such dilemmas were also exposed, illuminating congruity and incongruity between discursive strategies and participants' ideals. Finally, I presented four conceptual ideals which, when combined with the intentional use of discursive strategies, can contribute to improved management of dilemmas during ARD meetings. Discourse happens. It is the effectiveness of this discourse – specifically as related to managing dilemmas at ARD meetings – that can be determined by discursive partners if each is willing to speak, review, change and repeat their message.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Communication plays in both personal and professional spaces. I recall many instances in my personal and professional lives where a better understanding of communication could have yielded different, perhaps more positive outcomes. As a result, my research interest is to explore conflict-based discourses, in order to find middle grounds, build bridges, and work towards shared interests especially in issues concerning special education.

The federal law IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act) is dedicated to communication, as evidenced by the expectation of meaningful collaboration between parents and public schools at Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meetings (IDEIA, 2004). In chapter four, I presented the experiences of three campus administrators and three parents of students with disabilities, as they related to the decision making process at ARD meetings. These participants were purposefully selected as information-rich sources that could provide an in-depth understanding of discursive issues at ARD meetings.

This study utilized an action-based approach to discourse analysis, grounded in a theory of practical application. In accordance with the selected approach, the following research questions guided the study:

1. How do campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities describe their respective dilemmas during their participation in ARD meetings?
2. What interactional strategies are utilized by campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities when handling dilemmas at ARD meetings?
3. What expectations do campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities have about their roles in ARD meetings?

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Robert Craig and Karen Tracy's (2011) Grounded Practical Theory (GPT). As previously discussed in Chapter two, GPT uses empirical data from a practice to theoretically reconstruct communication problems within that practice (Craig & Tracy, 2011). Data used in the reconstruction is derived from observation of the practice and information from those who participate in the practice. ARD meetings were the practice at the center of this study. This problem-centered model of reconstruction occurs on the three interconnected planes labeled as the problem level, the technical level, and the philosophical level (Craig, 1995). The data used in the reconstruction comes from observation of the practice – in this case, ARD meetings – and from participant disclosures. Reconstruction occurs on three interconnected planes: the problem level, the technical level, and the philosophical level (Craig, 1995). The problem level includes dilemmas that are typically encountered in the practice. Based on my current professional status as Director of Special Education, I have witnessed numerous dilemmas at ARD meetings. Common dilemmas at ARD meetings include disagreements about services or service providers or misunderstandings about student progress. My role in this research is critical to my role as a Director of Special Education, as disclosed in chapter three.

The majority of literature on ARD meetings highlights preparation and expectations for the meetings on the parts of parents and administrators (Adams, 2011; Bordin & Lytle, 2000; Cooper & Rascon, 1994; Fish, 2009; Lytle & Bordin, 2011). ARD meetings tend to be viewed by researchers as an event to be reckoned with, rather than a stepping-stone towards collective problem solving (Hammond, Ingalls & Trussell, 2008; Hess, 2006; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011; Sheehey, 2006).

The technical level of GPT is used to detect strategies for solving issues and addressing dilemmas identified at the problem level. Since discourse is the mode of operation at ARD meetings, strategies include communicative actions and techniques. When a person is actively involved in a practice, specifically in the throes of a dilemma, it can be difficult to reflect on verbal exchanges, and adjust their discourse accordingly. The technical level of GPT creates the opportunity for such reflection. With outcomes that include "reasoned principles" (Craig & Tracy, 2011), the philosophical level of GPT provides the means to take action in managing the dilemmas identified at the problem level.

Action-Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA) (Tracy, 2008) was used to analyze discourses in this study. This analysis identified situated ideals, dilemmas in ARD meetings, and strategies used by participants to address those dilemmas. Concept-based actions for participants to consider should they want to gain desired outcomes and act in alignment with their ideals in ARD meetings were also developed as a path for engaging in productive dialogues. Using GPT and AIDA allowed a deeper insight into (a) what participants believed should occur at ARD meetings, (b) the dilemmas that did occur at ARD meetings, (c) how participants' discourses contributed to dilemmas, (d) how participants managed such dilemmas through discourse, and (e) what actions participants could take to improve the discourse at ARD meeting.

Before, During and After the Conflict

Conflict is an inevitable part of the human condition (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). As human beings we possess individual thoughts, standards, and beliefs. As a result, we may at times experience incompatible differences with others, feel unfairly judged, or sense that our needs, values, and resources are being threatened. Deutsch (1973) asserts that conflict is not created by situations, but our reactions to those situations. Numerous studies identify actions that administrators and parents can take to avoid dilemmas at ARD meetings (Adams, 2011;

Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Rock, 2000). While such recommendations may be legitimate and useful tools, most are intended as preparatory steps stemming from a belief that the more prepared one is, the less likely conflict will occur. There are also several legally sanctioned options available to parents and administrators in the case that an ARD meeting reaches an irreconcilable disagreement. These include submitting a formal complaint, going to mediation, or filing a due process hearing (IDEIA, 2004). Additionally at the time of this writing, the Texas Education Agency recently implemented ARD facilitation as a viable, voluntary conflict resolution option for parents through HB 524 (Senate Bill 542, 2013).

While strategies for use before and after conflicts seem common in the literature, there is little literature regarding strategies that can be useful during conflict. The findings of this study contribute to filling that gap in the literature. Participants were provided reflective opportunities to (a) recognize how their discourse contributed to dilemmas, (b) recognize how the discourse of others contributed to dilemmas and (c) expand their repertoire of responses as they face dilemmas during ARD meetings. It is pertinent to note that increased awareness alone will not yield change unless the person involved in the discourse of the practice is willing to actively participate in the reflective and intentional cycle of speaking, reviewing their discursive contribution to the dilemma, changing their discourse, and repeating their message. This study addresses actionable responses to conflict as it occurs.

Practical Improvement

The findings of this study support the use of Grounded Practical Theory (GPT) and its Action Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA) as effective tools for qualitative research (Craig, & Tracy, 1995; Tracy, 1995). Using GPT and AIDA, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of how dilemmas are handled at ARD meetings from the perspectives of parents and administrators. Examining participants' discourses allowed for a more insightful perception into

their experiences and situated ideals that would not have been gained through traditional discourse analysis techniques.

This study generated a practical theory and strategies intended to benefit participants as well as the practice of ARD meetings. Participants gained insight into how self-identified ideals related to the process of ARD meetings and their own actions during those meetings. During interviews, participants had an opportunity to reflect on changes they could make to align their ideals with their actions. The ultimate responsibility for messages lies with the sender. If the message does not accomplish the intention of the speaker then some aspect of the message has to be altered whether it is the content, timing, volume, tone, vocal quality, prosody, or any other multitude of discursive elements. By proposing that participants reflect on their own discourse, this study created the opportunity to make such changes. Lastly, this study allowed parents and administrators to improve the overall practice of ARD meetings through action-based strategies based on reflection on their own discourse (Tracy, 2008). Kalyanpur & Harry (1997) also recommend reflective practice as an approach for minimizing barriers to collaboration. This study produced ways and means for ARD meeting participants to do so.

Bringing parents and administrators to a reflective space in safe nurturing ways can contribute to how participants conceptualize their roles and relate to other stakeholders during ARD meetings. Moreover, if these stakeholders engage in the conceptual and strategic recommendations suggested in this study, they will be less likely to engage in conflict and more likely to forge collaborative relationships. Previous literature either prescribes preventive measures before ARD meetings, or damage control tactics after ARD meetings. This study offers a dialogic space where stakeholders can engage in empathy, become mindful of their communication strategies, and reflect on the roles they play in ARD meetings.

Bridging Observation and Action

In their study Lake and Billingsly (2000) identified numerous elements that contributed to conflict at special education meetings from the perspective of parents, administrators and mediators as gained through phone interviews. Researchers (Hammond, Ingalls & Trussell (2008); Sheehey, 2006) have also noted that differences in perspective and insufficient opportunities for parents to be involved in the decision-making process during the ARD meeting contribute to dilemmas. This study expands previous research by observing actual experiences and using personal interviews with parents and administrators to reveal dilemmas that they faced during ARD meetings as opposed to drawing conclusions only from experiences as reported by participants. Furthermore, this study demonstrates how discourse contributed to the eight issues identified by Lake and Billingsley (2000) as well as how participants utilized discourse in response to the eight categories. Finally, these findings provide examples of how discourse could be used to successfully mitigate dilemmas therefore reducing the negative impact of such.

Another factor contributing to dilemmas in ARD meetings is discrepant views of a child or the child's needs (Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Hammond, Ingalls & Trussell, 2008; Sheehey, 2006). The findings of this study confirmed this, regardless of the parents' level or type of participation. One example of discrepant views includes the perspectives of child vs. student. Dilemmas were managed by administrators listening to the parent, acknowledging their perspective, combining the needs of the parent and the needs of the school to determine actions needed, and informing the parent of the rationale for recommendations. These discursive actions demonstrate the implementation of strategies aligned with contextual empathy, described in chapter four.

Family members' involvement is negatively affected by their feelings of guilt, embarrassment, anxiety, and pressure during ARD meetings. (Hammond, Ingalls & Trussell

2008). Parents and administrators felt that they could best communicate their concerns in a mediation setting of where there is a neutral third party facilitating communication (Lake & Billingsly, 2000). Therefore the presence of a neutral party who represents no vested interest may create an atmosphere of open mindedness and trust, and contribute to a more comfortable environment for parents and administrators involved in a dilemma. Pat Wheeler was able to create such an atmosphere during the ARD meeting with Ruby Williams. Although Pat obviously did have a vested interest in the outcome of the meeting, information was presented and gained in ways that separated Pat from the district as a whole. One way was by not blindly accepting the input of school staff. An excerpt from one discussion about revising Jack's IEPs is below:

> PAT: And that- and match it to what he should be at this grade level which in ninth and tenth grade is world studies and then U S history is 11th grade, so that's what I would encourage you to do as you develop those IEPs.
>
> SARA: I like that
>
> RUBY: Yeah, so do I because a lot of it is focusing on dates.
>
> PAT: But but- RR
>
> RUBY: You know dates you're talking about 1898 and 1914 and 19-
>
> SARA: Trust me I had to get creative that was for the state assessment.
>
> RUBY: You get what I'm saying? You know and I'm like that's where's [that gonna kind help? Let's give him something that's gonna help him.]
>
> PAT: [Yeah (slight laugh) that's for the state assessment]. But they are-[like I would-
>
> RUBY: [What I- yeah]

PAT: The-what's what is a really good one is that is is RR the uh>>>, geographical reasons for settlement for urban cluster for that's a very visual thing.

RUBY: You see and I think that will help him more than learning what happened in 1819.

Through this dialogue of questioning negotiating information from a teacher and a parent, Pat's position was that of a neutral party. This was verified in Ruby's response to the question, "What was it that Pat did that made you feel good?" during an interview:

Just that Pat had a lot of input. Pat knew what we were talking about. That's the kind of an administrator you need. You don't need an administrator just to be sitting there. Pat knew what kind of other different scenarios should be used, and where where RR they needs to go and what they had to look up, and where to the the RR information and how to revise it. Just with the IEPs let's change them, let's make them focus more on this than on that, instead of point A let's try point B or C. Let's write it down, let's look at different ways.

As a result, Ruby's perception was that Pat not only knew the topic but Pat was also willing to disagree with school staff, which she interpreted as caring. This is further evidenced in the following excerpt from our interview:

RUBY: Pat did what he needed to do and I did what I need to do but now I see that Pat cares about my kids and there's administrators that don't they don't know their names.

AMY: And it's important to you that Pat cares?

RUBY: It's important… Pat knows every kids' names I seen Pat talk to a child ok how's it going just uh- even those two minutes.

AMY: So how do you know Pat cares about your children?

RUBY: Cause Pat will ask about them even if I'm at a football game or at a baske- I'll be at a baseball game, and Pat will say, "Where's Jack? How is Jack?"

AMY: So Pat asks about them by name.

RUBY: Yes, by name you know. Pat know and he knows what's important. Pat knows it's important to be in basketball. Pat knows that what brings him to school. Every child has something that – on why whether it be socially, whether it's I don't get fed at home, whether I don't get that hug or that attention at home that I mean there's things.

AMY: Ok. Great. Um

RUBY: And it's not only my kids I see that he does it with other kids it's not just uh>>> it's not just about me it's about- across the board where I seen it.

By attending equally to input from parents and staff members, and processing information in a way that demonstrates the value not only of the input itself, but in the outcome of the decision making process, administrators can create a collaborative atmosphere at ARD meetings. As administrators tended to situate themselves in the role of negotiators and find a balanced middle ground, those may be reasons why there were only a few dilemmatic moments in this study for analysis.

Ruppar and Gaffney (2011) found that the structure of meetings and the discourse of school staff also influenced parents' willingness to share their opinions. In her study, only 29% of the special education meetings involved verbal interactions, while the majority was made up of presentations of information (Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011). The current study not only confirms these findings, but also demonstrates how this element is communicated and addressed through discourse. Jessica Johnson, a parent, accepted decisions of the administrator although she disagreed with them. Jessica communicated her perspective in sharing that,

> Because they're the ones- they're the administrator, the teachers, the people who make the decision. I don't' make the decision they make it….they make the decision…. Well, I can give my opinion. It's just that everybody has opinions. Everybody has assholes and everyone has opinions. So, um, I can give them my opinion, but I'm going to be over voted.

Not considering Jessica's difference of opinion as a dilemma, the administrator did little to further investigate Jessica's input and accepted her overt agreement without discussion. Adrian, the administrator, missed several opportunities to facilitate a discussion about or inform Jessica of decision making processes and services. Even when Adrian recognized that Jessica was expecting some guidance and information, Adrian did not capitalize on those moments.

A second example of how dialogue connected to knowledge and conflict involved Ruby Williams. Ruby mentioned during the interview that as a parent, she could sue the school district for various violations including the breach of confidentiality and the school's failure to provide her with her son's IEP before the ARD meeting. In the meetings, Ruby used this knowledge in the forms of ultimatums, requests, and insinuation. Pat recognized Ruby's dilemmas and managed them by being sure that she was provided the documents she requested. He confirmed that she had received them. Through discourse, and over the course of several topics, Pat rephrased options of compromise to include examples of how Jack would benefit from the proposed action. Pat created a need for Ruby's input in order to move forward with recommendations and provided insider knowledge about options presented for Ruby's consideration, such as in the following discussion about optional classes for Jack:

> RUBY: Is it culinary arts or is it going to be Ms. Long just like a food science?
>
> PAT: We could do either one.

RUBY: Because culinary arts is ?

PAT: Yes, yes it gets [double blocked though].

RUBY: [He told me there wasn't gonna be culinary arts

PAT: No there's-

RUBY: But Jeremiah told me-

PAT: There's there's RR a commitment to the culinary there was there was a- well let me clarify that issue. With Ms. Long retiring it was time to look at whether we needed to move her FTE somewhere else other than CTE and right now we are not.

RUBY: Okay

PAT: There was not a reason to be there, so there are gonna be two FTEs, two teachers-

RUBY: Uh-huh ((affirmative)) like she does

PAT: Food science and culinary arts. Now what the splits gonna be, that's up in the air. There will be both programs.

RUBY: Okay

PAT: We're committed to both programs.

RUBY: Alright

PAT: It may be more of one and less of the other uh>>> and then there'll be two and then there'll be two RR – well and then he doesn't care about this – two ag. teachers and uh>>> and uh>>> computer science teachers.

RUBY: Okay I wonder-

PAT: But we didn't move those around.

RUBY: Okay. My other question is is RR last year we asked for the art but because he had to take this other course in class he wasn't able to take it the art.

PAT: It sounds like we are opening the schedule.

RUBY: Okay

PAT: I don't see a reason-

RUBY: Okay so that's why I want to make sure that he's gonna be able to take these classes and just because the teacher has to- this is her set period to teach he's not gonna be able to take.

PAT: I want to say yes. There's always a chance of a singleton causing the problems that you are taking about, but I think we've got enough flexibility [in the schedule to make this happen.……..During the interview Pat explained that the action of outlining a plan and then obtaining parent and school input to complete the plan had been an effective tool for balancing the element of knowledge as well as input.

Service delivery and constraints can also contribute to the escalation of conflict (Fiedler, 1986; Lake & Billingsley, 2000). All parents in this study identified dilemmas regarding services for their sons: Ruby wanted a certain class for her son that he was not allowed to take the previous year; Elaine disagreed with the recommended amount of counseling for her son; and while the Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) recommended dismissal, Jessica believed that her son needed to continue receiving speech therapy. Although different in content, all three situations involved the parent disagreeing with the recommendation of the school. It is important to note that recommendations were made to the parents who were asked to agree or disagree, as opposed to having input in drafting the recommendations, Vincent & Evans state that "…IEPs and the meeting are ceremonial…..there is an appearance of fairness and diagnostic rigor even though they seem to be substantively absent from the proceedings." (1996, p. 4). However, each dilemma was managed differently by each parent and administrator. In Jessica's situation, her

request for more speech therapy was met by an explanation that since the SLP was not present no one else could explain her recommendation. They therefore asked Jessica if it would be acceptable to just have the SLP call her to discuss Jessica's concerns. Jessica accepted this offer without further questions. While the situation seemed to present an opportunity to respond to the dilemma with reassurance, or to review Jeremiah's progress in speech therapy, no response was provided by the administrator. In other words, the administrator seemed to value the ideal of having ARD meetings take place quickly and efficiently over seizing the opportunity to address the parent's dilemma. Not only can discourse affect dilemmas, but lack of discourse can also be influential.

Administrator Taylor Windham chose to manage Elaine's dilemma regarding counseling services by acknowledging her concerns and agreeing with her recommendation to change the amount of time from 30 minutes to 15 minutes. Elaine's response to this situation during the meeting was minimal, but during the interview with me afterwards she indicated that the dilemma was resolved. In addressing Ruby's dilemma regarding a course selection, Pat Wheeler's discursive response included the conversational move of maximizing. This was accomplished by sharing the history and the future of certain courses with Ruby. Pat also reviewed Jack's school credits, acknowledged Ruby's correction of a mistake in those credits, and refrained from complete agreement or disagreement with the parent's request. Pat's statement, "I think that is a definite possibility" both affirmed Ruby's request and allowed for other options to be considered when the time came to create Jack's schedule. Consequently, Pat's discourse contributed to the resolution of this dilemma both parties. Pat's use of tact, openness, sharing resources, and communicating positively are all indicators of a collaborative partnership (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

The constraints of time, personnel, and resources can be tied directly to services, as mentioned in the previous section. Both parents and administrators faced dilemmas in these areas. For Adrian, the constraint of time posed a significant problem:

> … there's only so many hours in the day and things like that have frustrated me….when we are taking that much time for a single student, we are taking that much time away from 30 to 40 students in other classes.

Adrian managed this dilemma by interrupting, rushing through the meeting, reading rote statements at a rapid pace, and providing input only when asked or needed. From a parental perspective, Ruby expressed concerns about such behaviors from Adrian. As a result, Pat had taken the role of administrator in all ARD meetings with Ruby since that time. This exemplifies how management of a problem can influence future conflict. It also confirms the findings of previous research (Esquivel, Ryan & Bonner, 2008; Newman, 2005), which emphasized the importance of anticipating, preparing for, and addressing issues that might arise during an ARD meeting before the meeting.

Finding ways to use parent input in the process of decision-making is key (Cooper & Rascon, 1994; Hammond, Ingalls & Trussell,, 2008; Sheehey, 2006). In order to gain the trust of parents, they need to feel that they are heard, and that their contributions to ARD meetings are valued by other stakeholders. One administrator, Pat, demonstrated how reciprocal power, trust, and communication were used to mitigate miscommunications by a change in one's state of mind and/or approach to an ARD meeting. Pat's awareness of self and of the parent was different during the first ARD meeting than it was during the second. Pat's self-description of being "flat footed" during the first ARD meeting insinuated that because of a lack of preparedness and focus, Pat's efforts to keep Ruby at the meeting would have been futile. However, Pat reflected

on what contributed to Ruby walking out of the first ARD meeting, and approached the second ARD meeting with a different state of mind and changed expectations. Pat also made intentional changes to how discourse was used to more clearly communicate value and trust. For example, in the first ARD, apart from a greeting, introduction, and a farewell statement, Pat made only one other statement directly to Ruby, "She had complications with her health that were unexpected, and that's probably what caused the delay." In the second ARD meeting, the majority of the hour-and-a-half long meeting involved direct exchanges between Pat and Ruby. Likewise, Pat's awareness and responsiveness created opportunities to make changes in discourse in the midst of conflict during the second ARD. As noted previously, parents and administrators are most comfortable in the mediation setting. Considering the present finding, additional exploration may be worthwhile into how participants' mind states differ between ARD meetings and mediation. Further questions regarding how power is communicated through discourse, through non-verbal communication, and even physical arrangement of the meeting space are also worthy of consideration.

Considering the present finding, additional exploration may be worthwhile into how participants' mind states differ between ARD meetings and mediation. Further questions regarding how power is communicated through discourse, through non-verbal communication, and even physical arrangement of the meeting space are also worthy of consideration. Feinberg, Beyer & Moses (2002) state that "…mutual gain is a new concept for many people" (p. 16).

This study likewise confirms the importance of involving the parent as an integral part of the decision making process during ARD meeting (Cooper & Rascon, 1994). A trend in the literature on ARD meetings is to place the onus on the administrator to create an atmosphere and provide opportunities for parents to be involved in more meaningful ways (Adams, 2011; Bordin

& Lytle, 2000; Newman, 2005; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011). This study offers ways for administrators to accomplish these objectives through discourse that is intentional, reflective, and compassionate, and which results in mutual advantage. This study not only affirms such, but also offers ways in which to accomplish that through discourse that is intentional, reflective, and compassionate and result in "mutual gain", a term that Feinberg(2002) shares as a "...new concept for many people" (p. 16).

This study argues for expanding the repertoire of discursive strategies for the management of conflict available to administrators and parents. It contributes to improved situational decision-making, based on new ways of thinking about discourse in response to dilemmas at ARD meetings. Additionally, this study affirms that discourse influences both the development and outcome of dilemmas, and promotes reflexivity of one's discursive choices. Finally, this study contributes to the ways in which communication can be improved in ARD meetings for all parties involved.

Researcher Reflection

There were instances throughout the study when my subjectivities were challenged. I felt at times that the participants of this study did not share my passion about the relevance of communication. I also encountered opinions that ARD meetings are burdensome, or that they serve no purpose. These opinions shattered my belief that anyone who works with students with disabilities has unending compassion, and puts the students' needs ahead of their own. I became discouraged when I was confronted with an affront of my conviction that all people who work in the area of special education should be committed to serving the needs of the student more so than his/her own. On one occasion I became so upset that I cried in frustration and had to walk away from my analysis because I was too angry to work.

I also realized the error of my supposition that, regarding my selection of a school district for this study, having more parent participation yielded less litigation and more consensus. This was evidenced through my experience with Ruby. According to Ruby and campus administration Ruby attended every ARD meeting for her child. However, it was revealed that Ruby's regular attendance did not minimize the occurrence of dilemmas. In some instances, her attendance increased the opportunity for differences of opinion. Likewise, her attendance created additional openings for discussion and collaboration.

Through this study, I also discovered that I take my subjectivities and positive state of mind for granted. I was saddened when I discovered that some people perceived ARD meetings to be simply an exercise for legal compliance, or only a listening opportunity rather than a collaborative effort. At times I had to fight the urge to become a crusader for parents as well as the ARD process itself. Once I was able to process these challenges beyond my emotional responses, they spurred me to work more diligently to facilitate effective communication at ARD meetings on behalf of students with disabilities

Conclusions

The first guiding question of this study referred to how campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities described their respective dilemmas during their participation in ARD meetings. There was a notable difference in these dilemmas; most importantly how the dilemma affected each party. Administrators identified dilemmas relative to elements they perceived to be within their control, or what they expected to occur. Dilemmas identified by administrators included: limited parental participation; persons at the meeting being unprepared; the purpose of ARD meeting not being accomplished; time spent off-task; the competing demands of campus needs versus ARD meeting needs; unexpected information shared at the meeting; fear of potential litigation; the use of jargon; responding to parents who seem

intimidated; rushing through information; and parents who disagree with recommendations. In other words, dilemmas for administrators were relative to control; either actual loss of control, or the perceived risk of losing of control.

Conversely, the dilemmas identified by parents concerned issues beyond their control. These included: not getting what they wanted; being at the mercy of the superior administrative knowledge and decision making power of the school staff; receiving less than undivided attention from administrators; being told how things will be done versus having a contributing voice in the decision making; feeling ganged up on, and over-voted; having people in attendance at the ARD meeting that did not currently or directly work with their children; having people at the ARD meeting that the parent did not know; breach of confidentiality; not being heard; and being perceived as simply a token participant, rather than a meaningful contributor. These dilemmas placed the parents in the position of the object or victim of the structure of ARD meetings, and of the enactment of policies and procedures by the administration.

The significance that can be drawn from comparing these experiences is that dilemmas are contextual. Even though parents and administrators might share a similar concern, the experiences of the parent or administrator contribute to how they specifically understand that dilemma, discourses that manifest and maintain the dilemma, and how the dilemma can be amended.

This study also sought to identify interactional strategies utilized by campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities when handling dilemmas at ARD meetings. The following 10 strategies were dominant among the administrators: rephrase, ask questions, check for understanding, wordsmithing, circle back, maximize, solicit parent input, create a plan, interrupt, and change the topic. These strategies were used with variations of

success in either resolving a dilemma or accomplishing a previously self-identified ideal. Asking questions was the most frequently used strategy. Checking for understanding was the second most frequent.

Parents implemented nine conversational strategies: asking questions, making requests, telling personal stories, keeping quiet, echo, rephrasing, staging, and disagreement. Humor was also used to diffuse tense situations, change topics, or contribute to conversation. Of these strategies, asking questions occurred most often, and keeping quiet was the second most frequent strategy.

The conversational strategy most frequently used by both groups was asking questions. However, intentions for using this strategy were rarely the same. Administrators typically asked questions to gain parental input, while parents mostly used this strategy to gain information, or seek accountability. Strategies used by administrators seemed to be circumstantial choices based on a desired outcome used to create certain situations. Strategies used by parents seemed to be haphazard, and more in response to situations. Amount of training, or different experiences may explain why strategies were chosen, and how they were utilized.

The third intention of this study is to identify and explain the expectations that campus administrators and parents of children with disabilities have regarding their roles in ARD meetings. Both groups considered themselves to serve an enforcer role. Administrators sought to enforce ARD meeting procedural compliance for the sake of legal compliance. Meanwhile, parents believed that one of their roles was to enforce the law as it related to them or services for their child.

Other self-identified roles included administrators as providers, taskmasters, and negotiators. Parents identified as care takers, advocates, and protectors. The roles they identified

for themselves seemed to differentiate based on focus, and were congruent with how each group perceived dilemmas. Administrators had an internal focus as they were mostly invested in how their actions impacted compliance with laws and procedural expectations. Parents, however, maintained an external focus as they prioritized their child. In other words, all roles identified for administrators revolved around themselves and how they could personally affect a dilemma or outcome. Parents, on the other hand, were most attentive to how external elements, such as services and staff, impacted their child.

Generally, parents and administrators used discourse to negotiate dilemmas during ARD meetings from different positions. Administrators utilized discourse to communicate their position as giver, as they provided information, services, answers to questions, and a sense of control to the flow of the ARD meeting procedures. Parents seemed to instinctively maintain their position as receivers. However, efforts to foster collaboration will be most successful if both groups were less polarized in these positions. In other words, parents should work to give the ARD committee more input, and administrators should endeavor to be more of a receiver of information from the parent. The more parents participate, the more administrators can receive information and utilize it in a meaningful way. However, to receive input from the parent, in this situation, implies the use of the information in collaborative decision-making. It is necessary that administrators function as more than mere receptacles for the input of parents, but that they consider the information provided seriously. In summary, if parents and administrators can abolish traditional, singular purposes, and engage in ARD meetings with a willingness to be both givers and receivers, dilemmas will be more manageable for both groups.

The findings of this study indicate that one's state of mind is relevant to conflict resolution. In chapter two, I discussed preparations to eliminate conflict as well as methods for

amelioration after conflict has occurred. This study supports such elements as legitimate characteristics of conflict mediation. However, I argue that for genuine resolution to be a viable option, the parties must come to the ARD table with certain states of mind, including unpretentious assertiveness, amenable uncertainty, optimistic presumption, and contextual empathy. Dingwall (2002) confirmed the relevance of state of mind when he challenged the assumption that resolution is possible in every conflict situation. He suggests that more focus be given to how parties involved in conflict can get to a "…sufficiently rational state of mind to engage in conflict" (p. 322). How one enters the ARD meeting has direct implications on the discourse of the meeting, interactions between stakeholders, and the outcome(s). Coming to a meeting with an adversarial state of mind will only yield outcomes that are undesirable and combative. Entering the meeting without a collaborative state of mind without the need to draw blood or move through the meeting as dictated by software would also result in unfavorable outcomes. Solutions can only be discovered when both parties enter the meeting with a state of mind that is conducive to dialoguing, sharing information, empathizing with each other's position, and expecting solutions. This is not to state that one needs to be naively optimistic about ARD meetings, but that it is important to work intentionally towards identify the common ground shared by stakeholders.

The purpose of ARD meetings is to identify and arrange for the provision of educational services for a student with disabilities. This purpose is only fulfilled when administrators and parents collaborate towards a shared goal, which serves the best interest of the student. If trusting relationships are created, the outcomes from the meeting focus on the student's educational needs both at home and at school. However, in difficult ARD meetings where there is a large divide in communication between parents and administrators, trust is eroded, and the

creation of collaborative relationships jeopardized. Parents and administrators stop seeing each other as collaborative partners, and develop a tense relationship where all stakeholders are on the edge. In these situations, administrators may become sensitive to their own actions, second-guess themselves, and focus on avoiding litigation from parents, rather than upholding the best interests of the child. Consequently, time is invested on documentation and verification, instead of exploring strategies that would meet the student's needs. Parents may not trust administrators' intentions. They may also inadvertently produce awkward situations for their children by drawing unwanted attention to them. Every stakeholder may feel justified in his or her positions. However, without contemplative understanding of the rationale behind those positions, what remains is a conflict-based relationship between the parents and the administrators, which eclipses the needs of the student or the child in question.

Implications

The findings of this study raise several implications for stakeholders of ARD meetings. They are intended to create additional dialogue and critical consideration of current discursive practices that occur during ARD meetings, specifically between parents and administrators. These implications are grounded in the assumption that stakeholders would rather minimize dilemmas, instead of escalating them to irresolvable discourses. Accordingly, these implications may serve as a platform for discussion among those involved in teacher training, parent training, advocacy, and educational leadership programs in order to propel an understanding of how discourse contributes to dilemmas.

The findings revealed that the relationship between parents and administrators can oscillate between cooperative, indifferent, and confrontational. As quickly as a connection is made between the two parties, that same connection can be broken. Consequently, relationships can become unintentionally adversarial. It would be unrealistic to not acknowledge that there are

exceptions wherein a person is intent on wreaking havoc within the special education process for personal gain at the expense of others. Setting those exceptions aside, this study reinforces the responsibilities of parents and administrators for using discourse to support a collaborative working relationship at ARD meetings

While it may the goal of completely eliminating conflicts at ARD meetings may be unrealistic, it is possible to minimize dilemmas emerging out discursive differences. In chapter four, I discussed ideals such as optimistic presumption, and contextual empathy to inform strategies for minimizing conflict. These ideals focus on creating generous discursive spaces that facilitate a better understanding of all parties. By creating these spaces, parties can understand each other contextually, and gain an empathic appreciation for the challenges faced by the other parties. Parties may then assume an optimistic outcome, instead of reacting to fear of a negative outcome.

It is important to note that there might be times when the level of dissent is so intense, that no common grounds for negotiations can be identified. In these cases, resolution tends to be sought through litigation. To avoid such outcomes, parents and administrators could choose to take action on the ideals of amendable uncertainty, and unpretentious assertiveness. These ideals were discussed in chapter four. Taking action on these ideals implies that parents and administrators are willing to acknowledge that neither party has all the answers yet both parties possess some unique expertise. Additionally, it is necessary to remain flexible to multiple ways to approach a solution. These recommended ideals require a sense of awareness, an ability to reflect on one's own position, and to make room for a different position to respond to differences mindfully. However, such awareness does not develop instantly, but requires training and practice.

For teacher training and educational leadership programs, the findings of this study highlight a need for direct instruction in facilitating ARD meetings. Since special education is frequently the source of costly litigation, school districts would benefit from teachers and administrators who are prepared to recognize and respond to discursive dilemmas in this field. While most educator training programs offer courses in special education, focused instruction that emphasizes ways that communication plays a role in creating and minimizing dilemmas could be invaluable. These skills could be used in many aspects of relationship building in public education. They can potentially contribute to harmonious collaboration, instead of confrontations that could possibly lead to expensive and time-consuming litigations. Therefore, an implication of this study may be a call for training in conflict management in special education. This training may be provided by regional service centers which already function as a state-funded resource to public and private schools and parents. By training teachers, administrators, advocates, and lawyers to effectively conflicts in ARD meetings, stakeholders may be better equipped to resolve dilemmas, and avoid litigation.

To effectively use the information gained from this study, stakeholders need to be contemplative of their own roles in creating, maintaining, and extending dilemmas. Improvement in the practice of ARD meetings requires intentional efforts that supersede ego, procedural obedience, and rigid compliance to pre-determined scripts. Intentional commitment in the form of personal reflection, evaluation, and change is necessary for even incremental improvement of conflict management.

As mentioned previously, one's state of mind when anticipating and addressing conflict is an additional implication to be considered. Finding a shared purpose between stakeholders is

critical before considering any conceptual framework, strategies, tips, tools, or alignment with compliance.

Future Directions of Research

This qualitative study was informed by Grounded Practical Theory (GPT) and Action-Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA). Using these techniques, I presented how six participants- three campus administrators and three parents of students with disabilities - experienced and managed experiences in ARD meetings. Similar studies could be conducted between parents and other members of ARD committees, such as parents and teachers, or parents and assessment staff. Comparisons could potentially be made between the discourses between parents and other categories of ARD participants. Such a study could provide further evidence of how communication affects the management of dilemmas between different participants in the same setting of ARD meetings. Given that there are few empirical studies in the area of conflict management in ARD meetings, the investigation of various relationships between stakeholders at ARD meeting would add valuable knowledge about discursive effects on creation and management of dilemmas.

This study utilized AIDA to analyze discourse in ARD meetings. In order yield a more detailed account of specific discursive elements such as length and frequency of pauses, sound/word/phrase repetition, vocal tone, and word frequency, further research on ARD meetings may be done using a more traditional for of discourse analysis.. The results of a study of this sort may expand the method of discourse analysis into the field of special education with a focus on conflict management at ARD meetings.

This study focused on the discursive experiences of two parties of the ARD committee, during only one or two meetings. Future research may choose to limit the focus solely to a

single party, such as parents, and to expand the period of research over the course of multiple ARD meetings. This could be helpful in answering additional questions such as:

- How do the discursive actions of parents during the first ARD meeting differ from their discourse during the third, fourth or fifth ARD meeting?
- How do parents understand their roles in ARD meetings after multiple years of experience, compared to their first ARD meeting?
- How do parents describe changes regarding their use and interpretation of discourse in managing dilemmas during ARD meetings over time?
- How do parents and administrators perceive the effect of constraints such as time, resources, and personnel on their abilities to perform their roles in ARD meetings?
- How does training versus experience influence the ways in which parents and administrators manage conflict in ARD meetings?

Future research may investigate how stakeholders may be inspired towards a collaborative and not combative state of mind. The questions of who is responsible for creating such state of mind, and what might it take to create, sustain, and extend that state of mind beyond the meeting, in developing a trusting relationship were beyond the scope of this study, and have yet to be answered.

Summary

The focus of this study has been to provide an understanding of how campus administrators and parents of students with disabilities negotiate dilemmas at ARD meetings through discourse. The findings of this study have created opportunities for actionable changes in discursive practices for all participants. In this chapter, I presented a brief synopsis of the study. I then discussed the contributions this study makes to the existing literature, and how it answers the research questions used to guide this study. I concluded this chapter with a

discussion about the implications and possible directions for future research as a result of this study. Through this study, I advocate for clarity and intention in discourse, in order to bring about authentic collaboration between parents of students with disabilities and campus administrators. This collaboration can support the educational progress of students with disabilities.

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APPENDIX A

Sample ARD Agenda

ADMISSION, REVIEW AND DISMISSAL (ARD) MEETING

Introductions
State name and role as member of the ARD Committee

Procedural Safeguards Given or Waived

State Purpose for ARD Meeting

Anticipated Duration of Meeting
Typical time frame
Ask if anyone has to leave early

Statement of Confidentiality and Conduct
All Information concerning a student with disabilities is confidential and may not be discussed with anyone except those who have a legitimate educational interest in the student with disabilities. Consistent with school board policy, persons participating in the ARD meeting will refrain from making any personal attacks on school staff, students, or parents. All participants are expected to speak in a courteous manner and in a conversational tone. This expectation must be followed in order to facilitate a safe, collaborative environment focused on the development of appropriate educational plans for this student.

Ground Rules
Agreement to maintain focus and efficiency
Agreement to avoid interruptions such as cell phones, beepers, ect.
Agreement to remain as a group unless already excused by parent ahead of time

PG 1

I. Review of Assessment Data

a. Assessment Reports
b. Full and Individual Evaluation
c. Other Evaluations/Assessments. Specify if any additional are needed
d. Vocational Assessment-Date(s) or Report(s) (if applicable)
e. Individual Transition Plan (if applicable)
f. Records from other schools (if applicable)

g. Information/Concerns from Parents/Student
h. Information from School Personnel
i. Information Records from other Agencies/Professionals (if applicable)
j. Language Proficiency (if ESL student)

PG 2

II. Determination of Eligibility

a. Type of Eligibility
b. Transfer Students Information (if applicable)

III. Competencies

a. Physical
b. Behavioral
c. Discipline-Discuss BIP (if applicable)
d. Prevocational/Vocational (when age appropriate)
e. Academic/Developmental , including LEP student language competencies
f. Assistive Technology needs
g. Indicate content areas in which student's disability significantly interferes with his/her ability to meet general academic mastery levels.
h. Communication needs
i. The student's disability affects involvement or progress in the general curriculum in the following ways:
    1. Discuss previous IEP(s)
    2. Discuss new IEP(s)
j. Transition Planning (when appropriate)

PG 4

IV Least Restrictive Environment Supplement

a. Evidence
    1. Supplementary aides and services previously provided
b. In selecting LRE the following considerations were given:
    1. Benefits
    2. Harmful Effects
c. Opportunities for this student to participate in all nonacademic and extracurricular activities
    1. Nonacademic
    2. Extracurricular
d. This student is educated with non-disabled students to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the student and is able to benefit from education with non-disabled students to any greater extent. Yes or No
e. Removal from General Education Campus

PG 5 and 5b

IV Determination of Services to be Provided

1. Current Year Schedule w/Modification(s) and STAAR (M/Alt)
2. Next Year Schedule w/Modification(s) and STAAR (M/Alt)
3. Instructional Arrangement
4. Related Service(s) w/time and frequency

PG 6

VI Service and Site Considerations

1. Results
2. If efforts are not successful, provide reason(s)
3. Students w/ visual or auditory impairment or deaf/blindness
4. Current Year Instructional Arrangement
5. Next Year Instructional Arrangement

VII Extended School Year Services

VIII Graduation (if applicable)

PG7

IX Assurances

X Signatures and SHARS Letter (if applicable)/Verbal Survey if time permits)

APPENDIX B

IRB

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
CORPUS CHRISTI

ERIN L. SHERMAN, MAcc, CRA, CIP
Research Compliance Officer

[illegible]
Corpus Christi, Texas [illegible]
O [illegible] • F [illegible]

July 5, 2013

Ms. Amy Mathews-Perez
P.O. Box 45
Portland, TX 78374

Dear Ms. Mathews-Perez,

The research project entitled "Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Annual Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School District" (IRB# 42-12) has been granted approval through a full review by the Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board (IRB). You are authorized to begin the project as outlined in the IRB protocol application.

IRB approval is granted for one year from the date the committee reviewed your protocol. You must submit an IRB Continuing Review Application for IRB committee review and approval should the project continue beyond July 5, 2013. Please submit an IRB Continuing Review Application two months prior to the approval expiration date to allow time for IRB review.

Please submit an IRB Amendment Application for any modifications to the approved protocol. Changes to the study may not be initiated before the amendment is approved. Please submit an IRB Completion Report to the Compliance Office upon the conclusion of the project. Both report formats can be downloaded from IRB website.

All study records must be maintained by the researcher for three years after the completion of the study. Please contact me if you will no longer be affiliated with Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi before the conclusion of the records retention timeframe to discuss retention requirements.

We wish you the best on the project. Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

Erin L. Sherman

Erin L. Sherman

FOR COMPLIANCE OFFICE USE ONLY:
IRB#
Date Received:
☐ Revision

Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY CORPUS CHRISTI
RESEARCH & GRADUATE STUDIES

INSTRUCTIONS

If you have any questions or need assistance completing this application, please contact Erin Sherman at (361)825-2497 or email erin.sherman@tamucc.edu

1. Complete CITI Training
CITI training is required for all researchers and faculty advisors listed on the protocol.
Note: The Certificate of Completion will be automatically emailed to the Research Compliance Officer upon completion.

2. Complete Form
All sections of the form are required. The protocol review will not begin if any section is incomplete. The form must be complete and free of typographical/grammatical errors.

3. Submit Application & Completed Supplemental Documents
Review of application will not begin until all required documentation is received.

*Submit this application with **ORIGINAL signatures** (PI, Co-PI, Faculty Advisor as applicable) and any additional documentation to: Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, FC 168 (Unit 5844) or erin.sherman@tamucc.edu.*

PLEASE NOTE: SIGNATURE PAGES MAY BE SUBMITTED AS EITHER (1) SCANNED ORIGINAL SIGNATURE(S) ON SIGNATURE PAGE EMAILED WITH FORM (2) PRINTED & SIGNED HARD COPY SUBMITTED TO COMPLIANCE OFFICE

Check which of the following documents are submitted with the protocol application:

- ☒ Any other documents referenced in this application as applicable (survey instrument, interview questions, debriefing form, payment schedule, etc.)
- ☐ Grant/contract proposal as applicable
- ☒ Permission from site of study as applicable
- ☒ Recruitment Materials as applicable: Flyers, Letters, Phone Scripts, Email, Online Posting, etc.
- ☒ Consent Documentation as applicable: Informed Consent Form, Assent Form, *Translated Informed Consent Form, and *Translated Assent Form
  **See Translator/Interpreter Guidelines on the IRB forms page*
- ☐ Conflict of Interest Disclosure as applicable

INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

A. Principal Investigator Information:

Name:	Amy Mathews-Perez
Address:	P.O. Box 45, Portland, Texas 78374

Please include unit number if address is on campus.

Phone Number: 361-876-5036

Email Address: amathewsperez@islander.tamucc.edu

Department: Department of Educational Administration and Research

College: Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi

○ Faculty ○ Staff Member ○ Undergraduate Student ● Graduate Student ○ Faculty Advisor ○ Other

Specify Other:

B. Co-Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor Information:

Name: Kakali Bhattacharya, Ph.D.

Address: TAMUCC, 6300 Ocean Drive , Faculty Center 223 Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

Please include unit number if address is on campus.

Phone Number: 361-825-6017

Email Address: kakali.bhattacharya@tamucc.edu

Department: Department of Educational Administration and Research

College: College of Education

● Faculty ○ Staff Member ○ Undergraduate Student ○ Graduate Student ○ Faculty Advisor ○ Other

Specify Other:

C. Co-Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor Information:

Name:

Address:

Please include unit number if address is on campus.

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Department:

College:

○ Faculty ○ Staff Member ○ Undergraduate Student ○ Graduate Student ○ Faculty Advisor ○ Other

Specify Other:

D. Co-Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor Information:

Name:

Address:

Please include unit number if address is on campus.

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Department:

College:

○ Faculty ○ Staff Member ○ Undergraduate Student ○ Graduate Student ○ Faculty Advisor ○ Other

Specify Other:

CONFLICT OF INTEREST CERTIFICATION

All Principal Investigators and Co-Investigators must certify the Conflict of Interest Statement below and comply with the conditions or restrictions imposed by the University to manage, reduce, or eliminate actual or potential conflicts of interest or forfeit IRB approval and possible funding. This disclosure must also be updated annually (for expedited and full board reviews)when the protocol is renewed.

Carefully read the following conflict of interest statements and check the appropriate box after considering whether you or any member of your immediate family* have any conflicts of interest.

****Immediate family is considered to be a close relative by birth or marriage including spouse, siblings, parents, children, in-laws and any other financial dependents.***

Financial conflicts of interest include:

- ***a) A financial interest in the research with value that cannot be readily determined;***
- ***b) A financial interest in the research with value that exceeds $5,000.00;***
- ***c) Have received or will receive compensation with value that may be affected by the outcome of the study;***
- ***d) A proprietary interest in the research, such as a patent, trademark, copyright, or licensing agreement;***
- ***e) Have received or will receive payments from the sponsor that exceed $5,000.00 in a specific period of time;***
- ***f) Being an executive director of the agency or company sponsoring the research;***
- ***g) A financial interests that requires disclosure to the sponsor or funding source; or***
- ***h) Have any other financial interests that I believe may interfere with my ability to protect participants.***

ORIGINAL SIGNATURES REQUIRED

PLEASE NOTE: SIGNATURE PAGES MAY BE SUBMITTED EITHER (1) SCANNED ORIGINAL SIGNATURE(S) ON SIGNATURE PAGE EMAILED AS AN ATTACHMENT WITH FORM (2) SUBMITTED AS PRINTED HARD COPY

Principal Investigator *(Typed)*: Amy Mathews-Perez

Principal Investigator *(Signature)*:

Date:

Conflict of Interest Certification: ◉ I have no conflict of interest related to this project. ○ I have a non-financial conflict of interest related to this project** ○ I have a financial conflict of interest related to this project**

B. Co-Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor Certification:

Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Typed)*: Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, Ph.D.

Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Signature)*:

Date: Check one: ○ Co-PI ◉ Faculty Advisor

Conflict of Interest Certification: ◉ I have no conflict of interest related to this project. ○ I have a non-financial conflict of interest related to this project** ○ I have a financial conflict of interest related to this project**

C. Co-Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor Certification:

Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Typed)*:

Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Signature)*:

Date: Check one: ◯ Co-PI ◯ Faculty Advisor

Conflict of Interest Certification: ◯ I have no conflict of interest related to this project. ◯ I have a non-financial conflict of interest related to this project** ◯ I have a financial conflict of interest related to this project**

D. Co-Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor Certification:

Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Typed)*:

Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Signature)*:

Date: Check one: ◯ Co-PI ◯ Faculty Advisor

Conflict of Interest Certification: ◯ I have no conflict of interest related to this project. ◯ I have a non-financial conflict of interest related to this project** ◯ I have a financial conflict of interest related to this project**

**PROVIDE DETAILS AS ATTACHMENT FOR ANY NON-FINANCIAL CONFLICT OR FINANCIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST RELATED TO THIS PROJECT.

PROJECT CLASSIFICATION

◯ Research Project ◯ Masters Thesis ◯ Class Project ◉ Doctoral Dissertation ◯ Program Evaluation ◯ Other

Specify Other:

REVIEW REQUESTED

Please thoroughly review the Human Subject Research Categories and Notes at the end of the protocol form before completing this section.

Exempt Review

*Are you requesting exempt status for the project?

◯ Yes ◉ No

If yes, based on which category outlined at the end of the application?

Category

Expedited Review

(Expedited review does NOT mean rushed approval. *Please allow at least two weeks for the expedited review process.)*

**Are you requesting an expedited review of the project?*

◉ Yes ◯ No

If yes, based on which category outlined at the end of the application?

Category

**** You may only select one of the above choices. A protocol cannot qualify for both exempt and expedited review.***

EXTERNAL FUNDING

Is the project externally funded? ○ Yes ● No *If yes, complete the remainder of the External Funding Section. If no, go to next section.*

External Funding Submission Deadline/Award Date: N/A

Funding Agency: N/A

PROJECT TITLE

Title of Project: Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School District

PROJECT DATES

Starting Date: Upon IRB Approval

The starting date CANNOT be a date before IRB approval is received. If you will start as soon as approval is received, enter "Upon IRB Approval" for the starting date.

Estimated Completion Date: May 2013

The above is an estimated date of completion. A Completion Report is due at the conclusion of the project noting the actual completion date.

PROJECT PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES

Describe Project Purpose:

Be specific and thorough.

The purpose of this discourse analysis study is to analyze communication patterns between parents of children with special needs and campus administrators in addressing dilemmas that arise at Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings in a South Texas school district. The researcher will purposefully select a district with a track record of being successful at resolving conflicts during ARD meetings. Within this district, campuses would be identified in advance in collaboration with the district's Superintendent and Special Education Director. By understanding various communication strategies practiced during the ARD meetings on those campuses that are successful in resolving differences, the researcher aims to develop comprehensive communication strategies that could be helpful for other campuses and districts in similar situations.

In general, parents and administrators have the right to bring in their own audio-recording devices to record proceedings of the ARD meetings and are allowed to do so if they so desire. Parents and administrators are also allowed to take their own notes and document anything they deem valuable during the ARD meetings.

The researcher is going to be a neutral observer at these ARD meetings where she will not be looking for legal compliance or lack thereof in the proceedings. The researcher's role will be that of a peripheral observer akin to a fly-on-the-wall where she will be focusing on how conversations take place during these meetings, how turn-taking happens between members at the meeting, how issues are discussed and conflicts are resolved at the meeting. The researcher will not interact with participants during the meeting nor be involved in the meeting in any way. The researcher will not offer any advice, professional insights, or demonstrate any advocacy for either the campus administrators or the parents. The researcher will make transcripts from the meeting available to both parents and administrators participating in this study upon request.

Describe Project Objectives and/or Research Questions:

Be specific and thorough.

Research questions that will guide this study include:

1. How do parents of children receiving special education services and campus administrators describe dilemmas that arise during their participation in an ARD meeting?

2. What interactional strategies are utilized by parents of children receiving special education services and campus administrators to address conflict at ARD meetings?

3. What expectations do parents of children receiving special education services and campus

administrators have regarding their respective roles in ARD meetings?

RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Description and Source of Research Subjects:

MINIMUM information to include:
1. *Target number of participants*
2. *Location of participants (on campus or specifically provide names for other locations - permission needed from other locations)*
3. *Manner in which participants will be identified from a larger pool of individuals*
4. *Inclusion & Exclusion criteria for participants (ex. age, physical characteristics, learning characteristics, professional criteria, etc.)*
5. *Minimum age for participants*
6. *How participants will be contacted (ex. online, through a faculty member, through a social networking site, through a professional in a specific field, etc.)*

1. The study will take place in Sinton Independent School District (ISD), a south Texas school district. Permission to conduct the study has been obtained (see attached letter from Sinton ISD Superintendent). Permissions will be sought from campus administrators, parents, and other members present at ARD meetings for transcription and videotaping purposes. However, data analysis will focus only on conversations between campus administrators and the parents of children who receive special education services at the ARD meeting and no one else. Generally, approximately five to seven members participate in ARD meetings which include parents, a campus administrator, teachers, assessment staff and related service providers. Amongst these persons attending the meeting, the direct participants for this study will be the parents of children with special needs and the campus administrators. All other persons attending the ARD meeting will be considered indirect participants.

2. The ARD meetings are held at a public school campus where the student attends school, therefore data collection will occur at a public school campus. The researcher will invite parents and campus administrators to participate in private, independent follow-up interviews. Such interviews will occur at a confidential location preferred by the participants as soon as possible following the ARD meeting.

3. The researcher will approach the Sinton ISD Superintendent and Special Education Director for recommendations of campuses with the most parental involvement in special education decision making in ARD meetings and a successful track record of conflict resolution. Then the researcher will send letters of solicitation (see attached) via regular and electronic mail to administrators at those campuses describing the study and the expected role the campus administrators would be playing as a participant in the study.

4. In collaboration with the Sinton ISD Superintendent and Special Education Director, the researcher will select no more than 3 campuses for the study out of those who volunteer. The selection will be made on the recommendation of the Sinton ISD Superintendent and Special Education Director about the campus' history on resolving conflicts successfully at ARD meetings. The researcher will also send letters of solicitation to parents of children with special needs attending the identified campuses, who are expected to be actively involved in their child's ARD meeting in the upcoming six months (see attached).

5. All direct participants will at least be eighteen years of age.

6. Once parents and administrators are identified as potential participants, the researcher will contact them via phone and/or electronic mail to set up a face-to-face meeting. In the face-to-face meeting the researcher will discuss the study in further detail, explain the expectations of the participant, answer all questions the participant might have and only when the participant is satisfied with all the answers provided, the researcher will request the participant to sign the informed consent form (see attached).

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS, & DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Describe Research Design. Methods and Data Collection Procedures for Human Subject Interactions:

Be specific and thorough.

Be specific to your study.

Describe the methods and procedures step-by-step in common terminology. Describe each procedure, including frequency duration and location of each procedure. Describe how data will be stored and protected, how long data will be kept

The proposed project will be a qualitative study analyzing spontaneous discourse and communication strategies between participants at the Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meetings, during which the special education services provided to specific students are reviewed and recommendations regarding educational programming for the upcoming year are made. The research design will be discourse analysis within the theoretical framework of grounded practical theory using Action-Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA) as the methodology.

Typical ARD Committee members include one administrator, one parent, one special education certified teacher, one general education certified teacher and a special education assessment representative such as an Educational Diagnostician or Speech Language Pathologist.

The campus administrators and the parents are allowed to audiotape the proceedings of the meeting and make any necessary notes for their own documentation purposes. In this study, the researcher will videotape ARD meetings occurring at the selected campus(es) in which two of the study's participants are involved, a parent and a campus administrator (see attached video analysis protocol). The researcher is going to be a neutral observer at these ARD meetings where she will not be looking for legal compliance

following the study, etc.

You do not need to describe the statistical methods for analyzing data once it is collected or other elements of the study not involving human subjects.

or lack thereof in the proceedings. The researcher's role will be that of a peripheral observer akin to a fly-on-the-wall where she will be focusing on how conversations take place during these meetings, how turn-taking happens between members at the meeting, how issues are discussed and conflicts is resolved at the meeting. The researcher will not offer any advice, professional insights, or demonstrate any advocacy for either the campus administrators or the parents. The researcher will make transcripts from the meeting available to both parents and administrators participating in this study upon request.

Each ARD meeting is expected to be between one to two hours long. The researcher will interview the direct participants (campus administrator and the parents) who volunteered to be part of the study using a semi-structured format (see attached interview protocols) within 48 hours following the ARD meeting. This interview is expected to last no longer than one hour. However, should the ARD involve or result in negative interactions resulting in the participant being uncomfortable with being interviewed immediately following the ARD, the participant may elect to be interviewed at a later time or not to be interviewed even though consent has been provided. Should the participant prefer to defer the interview, the participant will be allowed to determine when the interview occurs. Next, the completed interviews and dilemmatic portions of the ARD meeting discourse will be transcribed. This process will be completed for three to five ARD meetings (with at least one parent participant per meeting) thus a total of three to five parent participants will be interviewed over the course of the study.

As is dictated by the methodology of Action-Implicative Discourse Analysis (AIDA), "...selecting stretches of discourse to be transcribed is a theoretically shaped activity. Because one goal is to understand the problems of a practice, moments in which participants seem to be experiencing discomfort, tension, or conflict are especially likely for focus" (Tracy, 2005, p.301). All data will utilize self-selected pseudonyms for each participant. After all transcription is complete, and in congruence with grounded practical theory, the data will analyzed and used to reconstruct the ARD meeting discourse on three levels: "the problem level, the technical level and the philosophical level" (Streek, 2010, p. 147). Looking across all levels, the researcher will try to identify salient, over-arching patterns that will eventually crystallize into themes or findings of the study. The researcher will develop practical theories based on the findings of the study.

In an effort to assure appropriate interpretation and representation, each participant's transcribed data will be shared with them privately. At this point each participant will have the opportunity to affirm their input, remove their input or expand on their contributions. Following the completion of the study , the researcher will share the study's outcomes with each participant through face-to-face meetings and/or phone calls. At this time, participants will be provided the opportunity to share their perspectives regarding the outcomes as well as the overall process. Absolutely no information will be included in the findings without the participants' explicitly expressed consent. The participant will retain the right to remove any part or portions of the data for any reasons they seem fit without any penalty at any point in the study. Should a participant elect to withdraw from the study, all portions of recordings (audio and video) will be edited so as not to be included in the study.

Data will include videotapes, observation notes, interviews, researcher-driven analytical memos, ARD documents, documents provided by participants and the researcher's journal. Original data, transcribed data and outcomes of the study will be stored electronically on the researcher's personal laptop computer and phone which are password protected and accessible only to the researcher. Data will be shared with Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, Dissertation Chair, with the same standards of confidentiality. Videotape data and documents will remain locked in a cabinet in the home of the researcher. It is expected that the data from the study will be kept for approximately three years following the completion of the study.

RISKS & PROTECTION MEANS

Describe the Specific Risks and Protection Means for Human Subject Participants:

Be specific and thorough. If no risk, state "No risk." If risks associated with the study are minimal and not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life, state: Minimal Risk ***and***

Minimal personal risks are associated with this study. Absolutely no identifiable information about the participants will be used under any circumstances at anytime. As data collection will include confidential information as well as potentially stressful and emotionally charged discussions, participants will be protected in the following ways: responses will be kept confidential, participants will be afforded the opportunity to review data for accuracy and will be allowed to voluntarily resign from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Participants can remove any part or portions of their data at any given time as they see fit, without any penalty. Participants will also be provided a copy of the transcript of the ARD meeting that they participated in should they request one. All participants will be provided a list of resources should they choose to seek assistance and/or support related to stress or legal questions. Participants will be reminded that the study is not intended to find fault or exercise judgment

describe risks. The risk levels provided in the protocol and the consent forms must be consistent.

Describe each potential risk and the steps taken to protect human subject participants from the risk (ex. breach of confidentiality, data protection, possibly injury, psychological distress, pressure to conform, pressure to participate, etc.) Describe the protection means specifically and how participants will gain access to any necessary outside assistance (ex. medical care, counseling, etc.) if available.

Consider whether there are physical, emotional, social, legal, etc. risks if participants' participation were to become public.

regarding any element of ARD meetings, procedures or the participant's actions. The researcher will not act as an advocate or report on any legal compliance or lack thereof. The participants will be reminded of the researcher's neutral role of that of a peripheral observer. The participants will be reminded that this study does not seek to find fault with any party (parent or campus administrator), nor rectify or justify events that may have occurred at previous ARD meetings.

Regarding district/campus procedures, the researcher will make no judgemental reference nor determination regarding district procedures or practices related to the legal requirements of the ARD process in light of information gained during the ARD meeting observations. The researcher intends to identify communication patterns, discourse strategies and interaction techniques used by participants through discourse. As the researcher's presence at the ARD meeting will be only as a neutral observer, the researcher will not identify processes or procedures that may be incongruent with requirements of special education law. No personal harm will come to the participants as a result of the researcher's presence in the meeting. Because the law allows the participants to make their own recordings of the meeting, the researcher will provide the participants with transcripts of the meeting that they participated in should they request one. The risk to the participants is minimal as no information will ever be shared or used in the study at any point without the participants' consent. Additionally, no identifiable information about any minors will be used in this study for any purposes. Moreover, since the parents and administrators are allowed to document the proceedings on their own via audio taping, by providing the participants with a transcript of the proceedings of the meeting in which they participated if requested, the researcher will further reinforce her neutral peripheral observer position. Protection available in the utilization of a phone application for recording purposes is the use of a password for accessing the phone, thus before gaining access to any recordings. Also, titles given to the audio recordings will be based on the date of the recording with minimal identifiable information so as not to indicate the content of the recordings or identity of the participants. If a parent chooses to pursue litigation, it will not be due to the presence of the researcher, as the presence would be approved prior to the meeting, but their choice may be due to other issues associated with the campus or campus administrators, outside the scope of this study. If subpoenaed, the researcher will provide requested documents. This study's primary purpose is to identify communication patterns and techniques between parents and campus administrators who have a successful track record of conflict resolution during the ARD meetings in order to identify comprehensive communication strategies for conflict resolution.

BENEFITS VS. RISKS

Describe Benefits & Risks to Human Subject Participants:

Address benefits reasonably expected to the research participant and potential benefits to society. Any possible monetary compensation is not to be categorized as a benefit. Be specific and thorough.

There are no direct benefits to the participants of this study other than the monetary compensation for their participation in the form of a $20 gift card to Wal Mart. Indirect benefits to the participants include the provision of practical communicative strategies for use in future ARD meetings that will potentially support increased collaboration between participants should they choose to incorporate the strategies into their discourse. The outcomes of the study may also directly benefit public school districts for the same reason mentioned above.
Potential benefits to public schools and parents of students with special needs include reduced litigation in the area of special education in public schools and costs associated with it, and increased collaboration between parents and public schools as equal partners in the special education process.

INFORMED CONSENT METHODS

Describe Methods for Obtaining Informed Consent from Human Subject Participants:

Be specific and thorough. Describe how researcher(s) will gain access to participants, how participants will be provided the consent documentation, in what format the consent will be provided, any discussion that will take place with participants, and methods of

1. The researcher will approach the Sinton ISD Superintendent and Special Education Director for recommendations of campuses with the most parental involvement in special education decision making in ARD meetings and a successful track record of conflict resolution. Then the researcher will send letters of solicitation (see attached) via U. S. Postal service and electronic mail to administrators at those campuses describing the study and the expected role the campus administrators would be playing. The informational solicitation letter will request a response from volunteers interested in participating in the study.

2. In collaboration with the Sinton ISD Superintendent and Special Education Director, the researcher will select no more than 3 campuses for the study out of those who volunteer. The selection will be made on the recommendation of the Sinton ISD Superintendent and Special Education Director about the campus' history on resolving conflicts successfully at ARD meetings. In consultation with campus and district

communication utilized to keep participants aware of their rights throughout the study, if applicable. Points to remember:
(1) Participants must be given time to review the consent/ informational documents and ask questions
(2) minors must have a separate assent for participation written at a level appropriate to the age group of participants, and parents must be given a separate parental consent form.
(3) Information sheets should be utilized for exempt studies in which the only record of participants would be signed consent forms.
(4) The online consent template should be utilized as a guide for online survey consent.

administration, the researcher will contact parents of children with special needs attending the identified campuses who are expected to be actively involved in their child's ARD meeting in the upcoming six months (see attached). This will be accomplished with the assistance of campus administrators in sending letters of solicitation to parents via the U.S. Postal service or electronic mail including a request for the potential parent participant to contact the researcher if they agree to participate in the study or would like more information.

3. Within 48 hours of receiving a response of interest and in consideration of the recommendation of the ISD Superintendent and the Special Education Director, the researcher will contact each interested participant by phone or electronic mail to explain the research project further and answer questions posed. Participants that elect to join the study will be invited to a face-to-face meeting. At the meeting, the researcher will explain the study in further details and offer the participant the opportunity to ask any and all questions. The researcher will request the participant to sign the appropriate consent form(s) only after all of his/her questions and concerns have been addressed satisfactorily.

4. This study will involve direct participants who will be the parents and campus administrators. However, since there will be other persons present at the ARD meeting, the researcher will seek consent from these ARD members as Indirect participants. Indirect participants include persons other than the parent and the campus administrator who attend the ARD meetings. Once the researcher has been notified of the person(s) expected to attend the ARD meeting, a solicitation letter and informed consent (see attached) will be provided to each person via the U.S. Postal service, electronic mail and/or personal delivery. The researcher will make herself available for questions and further explanations regarding the study to any indirect participant. In an effort to eliminate any real or perceived coercion, the campus administrator will not be made aware of which indirect participant has consented to participate in the study. Each indirect participant will be asked to sign a consent form if and only if the participant deems that all his or her questions were adequately answered and they voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

5. The researcher will ensure that she has the committee members' completed consent forms prior to the ARD meeting and for those who deny consent, the researcher will make a note to not use any information shared by those participants during the ARD meetings or otherwise. For persons not providing informed consent, their discourse will not be transcribed, their image will be blurred on the videotape and their data will be edited so as not to be included in the study.

6. All participants will be assured confidentiality by being referred to by pseudonyms that they select for themselves. If a participant does not select a pseudonym, one will be assigned to him or her. All participants will be reminded that they may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Should a participant elect to withdraw from the study, all portions of recordings (audio and video) will be edited so as not to be included in the study.

☐ *Check if waiver of signed informed consent is requested. Justification must be provided for waiver. See waiver criteria at end of form.*

Justification:

INVESTIGATOR(S) QUALIFICATIONS

Qualifications of the Investigator(s) to Conduct Research:

Describe the qualifications of each investigator to conduct human subject research or attach CV/ biosketch.

The researcher is a Doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration and Research at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. The researcher has completed all required coursework in the doctoral program in the area of Educational Administration including courses in both qualitative and quantitative research methods and brings 19 years of experience in Texas public schools to this study. Those years of experience include fulfilling the roles of Teacher, Campus Administrator, Speech-Language Pathologist, district-level special education programs Supervisor, Educational Diagnostician and Director of Special Education. The online NIH course regarding the protection of human research participants has been successfully completed. This study will be supervised by Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, Professor of Qualitative Research at TAMUCC.

FACILITIES & EQUIPMENT

Facilities & Equipment to be Used in the Research:

The researcher will utilize a video camera, an audio-tape device (expected to be a software application the researcher's personal phone) and personal computer to record and maintain data. Facilities expected to

Describe any equipment that will be used, including audio/video equipment. ** Specifically list (by name) any off-campus locations that will be used.* *List any on-campus locations where the study will occur.*	be used include private rooms at Sinton ISD school campuses for ARD meetings, private meeting space(s) on campuses for administrator follow-up interviews and agreed upon confidential meeting places for follow-up interviews with parent participants.

* Investigators must submit permission from all off-campus study locations and/or organizations providing data, specimens, access to participants, etc. Permission must be submitted with the IRB protocol application.

INVESTIGATOR(S) RESPONSIBILITIES & SIGNATURES

By complying with the policies established by the Institutional Review Board of Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi, the principal investigator(s) subscribe(s) to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi. The principal investigator(s) further agree(s) that:

A. Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board before making ANY change in this research project.
B. Development of any unexpected risks will be immediately reported to the Institutional Review Board.
C. An annual continuation application will be completed and submitted annually for expedited and full review studies. The study will CEASE once approval expires.
D. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for the duration of the project and for at least three years thereafter at a location approved by the Institutional Review Board and as described in the protocol.
ALL INVESTIGATOR(S) AND ADVISOR(S) MUST SIGN THE PROTOCOL. The Principal Investigator should save a copy of the IRB Protocol Form after emailing the form to the Research Compliance Officer for review. Type the name of each individual in the appropriate signature line. Add additional signature pages if needed for all Co-Principal Investigators, collaborating and student investigators, and faculty advisor(s).

ORIGINAL SIGNATURES REQUIRED

PLEASE NOTE: SIGNATURE PAGES MAY BE SUBMITTED EITHER (1) SCANNED ORIGINAL SIGNATURE(S) ON SIGNATURE PAGE EMAILED AS AN ATTACHMENT WITH FORM (2) SUBMITTED AS PRINTED HARD COPY

A. Principal Investigator Certification:

Principal Investigator *(Typed)*:	Amy Mathews-Perez
Principal Investigator *(Signature)*:	
Date:	

B. Co-Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor Certification:

Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Typed)*:	Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya
Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Signature)*:	
Date:	Check one: ○ Co-PI ◉ Faculty Advisor

C. Co-Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor Certification:

Co-Principal Investigator/	

Advisor *(Typed)*:

Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Signature)*:

Date:

Check one: ◯ Co-PI ◯ Faculty Advisor

D. Co-Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor Certification:

Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Typed)*:

Co-Principal Investigator/ Advisor *(Signature)*:

Date:

Check one: ◯ Co-PI ◯ Faculty Advisor

Human Subject Research Categories

Please Note

Research involving special or protected populations, such as children, prisoners, pregnant women, mentally disabled persons, or economically or educationally disadvantaged persons, does not qualify for exempt review and is subject to full review.

The following types of studies do not qualify for exempt reviews and are subject to expedited or full reviews:
1) Studies involving a faculty member's current students
2) Studies supported by external funding
3) Studies involving the following and similar sensitive subject matters which can potentially cause discomfort and stress to the participant: Abortion, AIDS/HIV, Alcohol, Body Composition, Criminal Activity, Psychological Well-being, Financial Matters, Sexual Activity, Suicide, Learning Disability, Drugs, Depression

Studies involving audio taping and/or videotaping DO NOT qualify for exempt review.

7.1 Exempt Research Categories

7.1.1 Certain categories of research are exempt from the Protection of Human Subjects policy in the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46. The IRB Chair will determine, based on the federal guidelines, whether a research activity qualifies for exemption. Although exempt research is not regularly reviewed by the IRB, the exempt research form (and the informed consent form, if applicable) must be on file with the IRB, and the research may be reviewed at the committee's discretion. If the committee deems necessary, it may require a full review.

7.1.2 Unless otherwise required by federal departments or agencies, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are generally exempt from full review by the IRB:

1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal education practices, such as
   i. research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or
   ii. research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
   i. information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and
   ii. any disclosure of human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

3) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under the previous paragraph, if:
   i. the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or
   ii. federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

4) Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or if the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

5) Research and demonstration projects that are conducted by or subject to the approval of federal department or agency heads, and that are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine:
   i. public benefit or service programs;
   ii. procedures for obtaining benefits or services under these programs;
   iii. possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or
   iv. possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs

7.2 Expedited Review Categories

7.2.1 Expedited review procedures are available for certain kinds of research involving no more than minimal risk, and for minor

changes in approved research. Specifically, research is eligible for expedited review if it involves no more than minimal risk (see 45 CFR as amended) to the subjects and the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the categories listed below:

1) Collection of: hair and nail clippings, in a nondisfiguring manner; deciduous teeth; and permanent teeth if patient care indicates a need for extraction.

2) Collection of excreta and external excretion including sweat, uncannulated saliva, placenta removed at delivery, and amniotic fluid at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor.

3) Recording of data from subjects 18 years of age or older using noninvasive procedures routinely employed in clinical practice. This includes the use of physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve the input of matter or significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy. It also includes such procedures as weighing, testing sensory acuity, electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, diagnostic echography, and electroretinography. It does not include exposure to electromagnetic radiation outside the visible range (for example, X-rays, microwaves).

4) Collection of blood samples by venipuncture, in amounts not exceeding 450 milliliters in an eight-week period and no more often than two times per week, from subjects 18 years of age or older who are in good health and not pregnant.*

5) Collection of both supra- and subgingival dental plague and calculus, provided the procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques.

6) Voice recording made for research purposes such as investigation of speech defects.

7) Moderate exercise of healthy volunteers.**

8) The study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

9) Research on individual or group behavior or characteristics of individuals, such as studies of perception, cognition, game theory, or test development, where the research investigator does not manipulate subjects' behavior and the research will not involve stress to the subjects.

10) Research on drugs and devices for which an investigational new drug exemption or an investigational device exemption is not required.

11) Any other category specifically added to this list by HHS and published in the Federal Register.

* Subjects must be informed orally of the risk of bruising and infection.
** Moderate exercise does not include stress testing.

Criteria for Waiver of Consent

§46.116 General requirements for informed consent.

(c) An IRB may approve a consent procedure which does not include, or which alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent set forth above, or waive the requirement to obtain informed consent provided the IRB finds and documents that:

(1) The research or demonstration project is to be conducted by or subject to the approval of state or local government officials and is designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs; and
(2) The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration.

(d) An IRB may approve a consent procedure which does not include, or which alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent set forth in this section, or waive the requirements to obtain informed consent provided the IRB finds and documents that:

(1) The research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects;
(2) The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects;
(3) The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration; and
(4) Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

APPENDIX C

Solicitation Letters

SOLITICITATION LETTER FOR PARENT

Dear Parent,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration & Research at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. Under the guidance of my dissertation chairperson Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya (361-825-6017), I plan to conduct a research study titled *The Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School District.* The reason for this study is to gain an understanding of how dilemmas are resolved between parents and public school administrators at ARD meetings so that successful efforts can potentially be duplicated and thus shared with other parents as well as campus administrators. I am seeking volunteers to participate in the study. You have received this letter because you are a parent that is actively involved in the special education decision making process regarding your child.

If you agree to volunteer I will meet with you face-to-face at a public location of your choice to discuss the research study in detail and answer any questions you may have. Please know that as a volunteer participant, all of our discussions before, during and after the study will be held in the strictest confidence and you may exit from the study at any point without penalty. No identifiable information will ever be used in any part of this study. If and only if you feel that your questions and concerns have been adequately addressed and you agree to participate in this study, then I will request that you carefully review the informed consent and sign to denote your agreement.

What will you be asked to do?

- Agree to be observed and videotaped by the researcher (Amy Mathews-Perez) during an ARD meeting within the next 6 months
- Attend and participate in one private follow-up interview with the researcher within 48 hours of the ARD meeting that was videotaped and have the interview audio taped
- Agree to provide the researcher with documents you deem relevant and necessary to convey your perspective
- Respond to any follow-up questions the researcher might have when interpreting data (words said, intention conveyed) in an effort to maintain consistency and authentic representation of your input
- Agree to review and discuss outcomes of the study with the researcher and provide feedback.

All information shared throughout the study will be kept completely confidential. If you are

interested in volunteering as a participant for this study, please respond by either completing the information on the following page, signing this form and returning it in the included stamped, self-addressed envelope or you may simply contact me via email at amathewsperez@islander.tamucc.edu and provide me with the same information requested below. If you are selected to participate in this study, I will contact you to coordinate a personal meeting at a mutually agreeable time and place. Your time and consideration are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Amy Mathews-Perez,
Researcher

Printed Name _____

Title _____

Email Address _____

Phone Number _____

Preferred Method of Contact (circle one or both) PHONE EMAIL

_____ _____

Signature Date

SOLITICITATION LETTER FOR CAMPUS ADMINISTRATOR

Dear Campus Administrator,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration & Research at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. Under the guidance of my dissertation chairperson Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya (361-825-6017), I plan to conduct a research study titled *The Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School District.* The reason for this study is to gain an understanding of how dilemmas are resolved between parents and public school administrators at ARD meetings so that successful efforts can potentially be duplicated and thus shared with other administrators fulfilling the same role at ARD meetings. I am seeking volunteers to participate in the study. You have received this letter because you are a public school administrator involved in ARD meetings with parents of children currently receiving special education services.

If you agree to volunteer I will meet with you face-to-face at a public location of your choice to discuss the research study in detail and answer any questions you may have. Please know that as a volunteer participant, all of our discussions before, during and after the study will be held in the strictest confidence and you may exit from the study at any point without penalty. No identifiable information will ever be used in any part of this study. If and only if you feel that your questions and concerns have been adequately addressed and you agree to participate in this study, then I will request that you carefully review the informed consent and sign to denote your agreement.

What will you be asked to do?

- Agree to be observed and videotaped by the researcher (Amy Mathews-Perez) during an ARD meeting within the next 6 months
- Attend and participate in one private follow-up interview with the researcher within 48 hours of the ARD meeting that was videotaped and have the interview audio taped
- Agree to provide the researcher with documents you deem relevant and necessary to convey your perspective
- Respond to any follow-up questions the researcher might have when interpreting data (words said, intention conveyed) in an effort to maintain consistency and authentic representation of your input
- Agree to review and discuss outcomes of the study with the researcher and provide feedback.

If you are interested in volunteering as a participant for this study, please respond by either completing the information on the following page, signing this form and returning it in the included stamped, self-addressed envelope or you may simply contact me via email at amathewsperez@islander.tamucc.edu and provide me with the same information requested below. If you are selected to participate in this study, I will contact you. Your time and consideration are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Amy Mathews-Perez,
Researcher

Printed Name _____

Title _____

Email Address _____

Phone Number _____

Preferred Method of Contact (circle one or both) PHONE EMAIL

_____ _____

Signature Date

SOLITICITATION LETTER FOR ARD MEETING (INDIRECT) PARTICIPANTS

Dear ARD Meeting Participant,

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Administration & Research at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. Under the guidance of my dissertation chairperson Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya (361-825-6017), I plan to conduct a research study titled *The Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School District.* The reason for this study is to gain an understanding of how dilemmas are resolved between parents and public school administrators at ARD meetings so successful efforts can potentially be duplicated and thus shared with other parents as well as campus administrators. I am seeking volunteers to participate in the study. You have received this letter because you are expected to be a participant in one or more upcoming Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings.

If you agree to volunteer I will meet with you face-to-face at a public location of your choice to discuss the research study in detail and answer any questions you may have. Please know that all of our discussions before, during and after the study will be held in the strictest confidence. No identifiable information will ever be used in any part of this study. As a volunteer participant, you may exit from the study at any point without penalty. If you feel that your questions and concerns have been adequately addressed and you agree to participate in this study, then I will request that you carefully review the informed consent and sign to denote your agreement.

What will you be asked to do?

- Agree to be observed and videotaped by the researcher (Amy Mathews-Perez) during an ARD meeting within the next 6 months
- Respond to any follow-up questions the researcher might have when interpreting data (words said, intention conveyed) in an effort to maintain consistency and authentic representation of data obtained during an ARD meeting

All information shared throughout the study will be kept confidential. If you are interested in volunteering as a participant for this study, please respond by either completing the information on the next page, signing this form and returning it in the included stamped, self-addressed envelope or simply contact me via email at amathewsperez@islander.tamucc.edu and provide me with the same information requested below and I will then contact you. Your time and consideration are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Amy Mathews-Perez,
Researcher

Printed Name _____

Title _____

Email Address _____

Phone Number _____

Preferred Method of Contact (circle one or both) PHONE EMAIL

_____ _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX D

Consent Forms

PARENT CONSENT TO THIS STUDY

The Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School

Introduction
My name is Amy Mathews-Perez and I am a graduate student at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. I am conducting a research project exploring how dilemmas are resolved between parents and public school campus administrators at ARD meetings.

I would like your help with my study because you are a parent that is actively involved in the special education decision making process at the campus level regarding your child.

What will I be asked to do?
If you choose to assist in and contribute to the study, you will videotaped, audiotaped and observed at your child's ARD meeting that occurs within the next six months. You will interviewed within 48 hours following the ARD meeting and the interview will be recorded. Also, you will be allowed to provide me with documents you deem contributable and necessary to convey your perspective. You will respond to follow-up questions that the researcher may have while interpreting data and you agree to review and discuss the outcomes of the study with me.

What are the risks involved in this study?
The risks to you are minimal; you may feel uncomfortable talking about your feelings, sharing confidential information or being videotaped and audio taped. You will be provided with a list of resources (see attached) if you experience distress during this study. However, you may remove yourself the study at any time without penalty. There might be certain legal risks associated with your participation due to the researcher being an outside observer recording the proceedings. If subpoenaed, the researcher would need to provide the tapes/documents. However, as a participant you will have access to documents that you provided and a transcription of the meeting that you participated in for the purpose of this study. As a participant, you can request such information from the researcher at any time, without a subpoena, but as part of your agreement to participate in the study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
There are no direct benefits for participants involved in this study. However, the outcomes could potentially, should participants choose to take action, provide communication strategies that will enhance and improve collaboration between parents and public school campus administrators at ARD meetings thus reducing conflict. Further, this study may lead to changes in communication

styles, techniques, procedures and strategies used at ARD meetings that result in closer adherence to the intention of the law wherein parents and public schools are equal partners in decision making for students with disabilities.

Am I required to be part of the study?
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequence. Any portion of the recordings where you appear will not be used in the study if you withdraw. The researcher will edit portions of the tape in which you appear to respect your withdrawal.

Who will know I am participating in the study?
No identifiable information about you or provided by you will be shared with anyone other than me (the researcher) and my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya. All identifiable information will be kept confidential. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for yourself that will be used with transcribing interviews or videotaped conversations. If you do not select a pseudonym, one will be assigned to you. All data will be maintained exclusively by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office and password protected on the researcher's laptop computer.

Will I be compensated for my participation in this study?
As a participant in this study, you will receive compensation in the form of a $20 Wal-Mart gift card for your voluntary participation in this study.

Whom do I contact if I have questions about the research?
This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or erin.sherman@tamucc.edu. If you have questions regarding this study you may contact me, the researcher Amy Mathews-Perez by phone at 361-876-5036 or via email at amathewsperez@islander.tamucc.edu You may also contact my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, by phone at 361-825-6017 or via email at kakali.bhattachrya@tamucc.edu.

Amy Mathews-Perez,
Researcher

If you agree to participate in this study, please read the attached consent form carefully, ask any questions you may have about the study, and then sign the consent form to demonstrate understanding of your expected role in this study.

Consent Form for Parent Participant

I, _____, agree to participate in the study explained above as part of a doctoral dissertation by Amy Mathews-Perez chaired by Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya (361-825-6017) from the Department of Educational Administration & Research at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi titled *The Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School District.* I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can stop taking part in the study at any time, without any reason and without penalty. I can ask to have all information about me returned to me, removed from the research records or destroyed. The reason for this study is so that the researcher can gain some understanding of my perspective as a member of an ARD Committee as well as observe how conversation impacts relationships at ARD meetings.

If I volunteer participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following:

1. Agree to be observed and videotaped by the principal investigator (Amy Mathews-Perez) during an ARD meeting within the next 6 months
2. Attend and participate in one private follow-up interview with the researcher within 48 hours of the ARD meeting that was videotaped
3. Agree to provide the researcher with documents I deem contributable and necessary to convey my perspective or support any claim(s)
4. Respond to any follow-up questions the researcher might have when interpreting data (words said, intention conveyed) in an effort to maintain consistency and authentic representation of my input

I understand that:

1. The researcher will audiotape conversations and interviews that occur between the researcher and me
2. The ARD meeting will be videotaped
3. The data will be kept by the researcher and will be shared with dissertation chair Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya while maintaining confidentiality
4. The researcher will analyze the data and keep it no longer than two years after the last date of data collection for educational and research purposes
5. There is no direct benefit for participating in the study, there is minimal risk and if I experience some discomfort or stress during interviews, observations or conversations, then I can choose to quit being in the study without any penalty

No information about me or provided by me during the research, will be known by anyone else except the researcher conducting this study, Amy Mathews-Perez and her dissertation chairperson Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, except if it is necessary to protect my welfare (for example, if I were injured and need physician care) or if required by law. I will create a pseudonym (fake name) for myself which will be used in transcription and all other data documents. In the event

that I do not create a pseudonym the researcher will assign one to me by the researcher. I can withdraw from this study at any point without penalty.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now and during the course of the study.

I understand that by my signature on this form I am agreeing to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

_____ _____

Researcher Signature Date

_____

Parent's Printed Name

_____ _____

Parent Signature Date

Please sign two copies and return one to the researcher

CAMPUS ADMINISTRATOR CONSENT TO THIS STUDY

The Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Annual Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School District

Introduction
My name is Amy Mathews-Perez and I am a graduate student at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. I am conducting a research project exploring how dilemmas are resolved between parents and public school campus administrators at annual ARD meetings.

I would like your help with my study because you have demonstrated success in handling dilemmas at annual ARD meetings as a public school campus administrator with at least one year of experience.

What will I be asked to do?
If you choose to assist in and contribute to the study, you will videotaped, audiotaped and observed at a student's annual ARD meeting that occurs within the next six months. You will interviewed within 48 hours (or as soon as is feasible) following the videotaped ARD meeting and the interview will be recorded. Also, you will be allowed to provide the researcher with documents you deem contributable and necessary to convey your perspective. You will respond to follow-up questions that the researcher may have while interpreting data and you agree to review and discuss the outcomes of the study with the researcher.

What are the risks involved in this study?
The risks to you are minimal: You may feel uncomfortable talking about your feelings, sharing confidential information or being videotaped and audio taped. However, you may remove yourself the study at any time without penalty. You will be provided with a list of resources (attached) if you experience distress or have further questions throughout the course of this study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
There are no direct benefits for participants involved in this study. However, the outcomes could potentially, should participants choose to take action, provide communication strategies that will enhance and improve collaboration between parents and public school campus administrators at annual ARD meetings thus reducing conflict. Further, this study may lead to changes in communication styles, techniques, procedures and strategies used at ARD meetings that result in closer adherence to the intention of the law wherein parents and public schools are equal partners in decision making for students with disabilities.

Am I required to be part of the study?
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may remove yourself from the study at any time without penalty.

Who will know I am participating in the study?
No identifiable information about you or provided by you will be shared with anyone other than me (the researcher) and my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya. All information

will be kept confidential. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for yourself that will be used with transcribing interviews or videotaped conversations. If you do not select a pseudonym, one will be assigned to you by the researcher. All data will be maintained exclusively by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office and on the researcher's password protected laptop computer.

Will I be compensated for my participation in this study?
As a participant in this study, you will receive compensation in the form of a $20 Wal-Mart gift card for your voluntary participation in this study.

Whom do I contact if I have questions about the research?
This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or erin.sherman@tamucc.edu. If you have questions regarding this study you may contact me, the researcher, Amy Mathews-Perez by phone at 361-876-5036 or via email at amp2012research@yahoo.com. You may also contact my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, by phone at 361-825-6017 or via email at kakali.bhattachrya@tamucc.edu.

Amy Mathews Perez
Director of Special Education,
Gregory-Portland ISD

If you agree to participate in this study, please read the attached consent form carefully, ask any questions you may have about the study, and then sign the consent form to demonstrate understanding of your expected role in this study.

Consent Form for Campus Administrator Participant

I, _____, agree to participate in the study explained above as part of a doctoral dissertation by Amy Mathews-Perez chaired by Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya (361-825-6017) from the Department of Educational Administration & Research at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi titled *The Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Annual Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School District.* I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can stop taking part in the study at any time, without any reason and without penalty. I can ask to have all information about me returned to me, removed from the research records or destroyed. The reason for this study is so that the researcher can gain some understanding of my perspective as a member of an annual ARD Committee as well as observe how conversation impacts relationships at ARD meetings.

If I volunteer participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following:

5. Agree to be observed and videotaped by the researcher(Amy Mathews-Perez) during an annual ARD meeting within the next 6 months
6. Attend and participate in one private follow-up interview with the researcher within 48 hours (or as soon as is feasible) of the annual ARD meeting that was videotaped
7. Agree to provide the researcher with documents I deem contributable and necessary to convey my perspective or support any claim(s)
8. Respond to any follow-up questions the researcher might have when interpreting data (words said, intention conveyed) in an effort to maintain consistency and authentic representation of my input

I understand that:

6. The researcher will audiotape conversations and interviews that occur between the researcher and me.
7. An annual ARD meeting that I attend as the campus administrator/district representative will be videotaped.
8. The data will be kept by the researcher and will be shared only with her dissertation chair Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya while maintaining confidentiality.
9. The researcher will analyze the data and keep it no longer than three years after the last date of data collection for educational and research purposes.
10. There is no direct benefit for participating in the study, there is minimal risk and if I experience some discomfort or stress during interviews, observations or conversations, then I can choose to quit being in the study without any penalty.

No information about me or provided by me during the research, will be known by anyone except the researcher conducting this study, Amy Mathews-Perez, and her dissertation chairperson Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, except if it is necessary to protect my welfare (for example,

if I were injured and need physician care) or if required by law. I will create a pseudonym (fake name) for myself which will be used in transcription and all other data documents. In the event that I do not create a pseudonym the researcher will assign one to me. I can withdraw from this study at any point without penalty.

The researcher will answer any further questions I may have about the research, now and during the course of the study.

I understand that by my signature on this form I am agreeing to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

_____ _____

Researcher Signature Date

_____

Participant's Printed Name

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

Please sign two copies and return one to the researcher

INDIRECT PARTICIPANT CONSENT TO THIS STUDY

The Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Annual Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School District

Introduction
My name is Amy Mathews-Perez and I am a graduate student at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi. I am conducting a research project exploring how dilemmas are resolved between parents and public school campus administrators at annual ARD meetings.

I would like your help with my study because you are anticipated to be a participant in an upcoming annual ARD meeting which will be utilized in my study.

What will I be asked to do?
If you choose to assist in and contribute to the study, you will be videotaped, audiotaped and observed at designated annual ARD meetings that occur within the next six months.

What are the risks involved in this study?
The risks to you are minimal; you may feel uncomfortable sharing confidential information or being videotaped and audio taped. However, you may remove yourself the study at any time without penalty. You will be provided with a list of resources (attached) if you experience distress discussing conflict during this study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
There are no direct benefits for participants involved in this study. However, the outcomes could potentially, should participants choose to take action, provide communication strategies that will enhance and improve collaboration between parents and public school campus administrators at annual ARD meetings thus reducing conflict. Further, this study may lead to changes in communication styles, techniques, procedures and strategies used at ARD meetings that result in closer adherence to the intention of the law wherein parents and public schools are equal partners in decision making for students with disabilities.

Am I required to be part of the study?
Participation in this study is voluntary. You may remove yourself from the study at any time without penalty.

Who will know I am participating in the study?
No identifiable information about you or provided by you will be shared with anyone other than me (the researcher) and my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya. All identifiable information will be kept confidential. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym for yourself that will be used with transcribing interviews or videotaped conversations. If you do not select a pseudonym, one will be assigned to you by the researcher. All data will be maintained exclusively by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office and password protected on the researcher's laptop computer.

Will I be compensated for my participation in this study?
You will not receive any compensation for your voluntary participation in this study.

Whom do I contact if I have questions about the research?
This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or erin.sherman@tamucc.edu. If you have questions regarding this study you may contact me, the researcher, Amy Mathews-Perez by phone at 361-876-5036 or via email at amp2012research@yahoo.com. You may also contact my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, by phone at 361-825-6017 or via email at kakali.bhattachrya@tamucc.edu.

Amy Mathews Perez
Director of Special Education,
Gregory-Portland ISD

If you agree to participate in this study, please read the attached consent form carefully, ask any questions you may have about the study, and then sign the consent form to demonstrate understanding of your expected role in this study.

Consent Form for Indirect Participant

I, _____, agree to participate in the study explained above as part of a doctoral dissertation by Amy Mathews-Perez chaired by Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya (361-825-6017) from the Department of Educational Administration & Research at Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi titled *The Evolution of Solution: The Role of Discourse in Resolving Dilemmas at Annual Admission, Review and Dismissal Meetings in a South Texas School District.* I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can stop taking part in the study at any time, without any reason and without penalty. I can ask to have all information about me returned to me, removed from the research records or destroyed. The reason for this study is so that the researcher can gain some understanding of my perspective as a member of an annual ARD Committee as well as observe how conversation impacts relationships at ARD meetings.

If I volunteer participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following:

9. Agree to be observed and videotaped by the researcher(Amy Mathews-Perez) during an annual ARD meeting within the next 6 months
10. Agree to respond to any follow-up questions the researcher might have when interpreting data (words said, intention conveyed) in an effort to maintain consistency and authentic representation of data

I understand that:

11. One or more annual ARD meetings that I attend will be videotaped.
12. The data will be kept by the researcher and will be shared only with dissertation chair Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya while maintaining confidentiality.
13. The researcher will analyze the data and keep it no longer than three years after the last date of data collection for educational and research purposes.
14. There is no direct benefit for participating in the study, there is minimal risk and if I experience some discomfort or stress then I can choose to withdraw from the study without any penalty.

No information about me or provided by me during the research, will be known by anyone else except the researcher conducting this study, Amy Mathews-Perez, and her dissertation chairperson Dr. Kakali Bhattacharya, except if it is necessary to protect my welfare (for example, if I were injured and need physician care) or if required by law. I will create a pseudonym (fake name) for myself which will be used in transcription and all other data documents. In the event that I do not create a pseudonym the researcher will assign one to me. I can withdraw from this study at any point without penalty.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now and during the course of the study.

I understand that by my signature on this form I am agreeing to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

_____ _____

Researcher Signature Date

_____

Participant's Printed Name

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

Please sign two copies and return one to the researcher

APPENDIX E

Time (in days & weeks)	Duration	Description of activity	Participant's role
This activity occurred Throughout the study	• Varied	• Researcher's Journaling	• N/A
Week 1	• 2 hours • 1 hour • 1 hour	• Contact Participants • Prepare for interviews • Initial meeting with Parent Participant A	• Respond to invitation and participate in meeting
Week 2	• 1 hour • 1 hour • 1 hour • 1 hour	• Transcription • Initial meeting with Parent Participant B • Initial meeting with Parent Participant C	• Participate in meeting
Week 3	• 3 hours • 1 hour • 1 hour • 1 hour	• Transcription • Initial meeting with Admin. Participant A • Initial meeting with Admin. Participant B • Initial meeting with Admin. Participant C	• Participate in meeting
Week 4	• 4 hours • 1 hour	• Transcription • Prepare for observation of ARD meeting #1 for Participants A	• N/A
Week 5	• .5 hour • 1 hour	• Observe/videotape ARD meeting #1 for Participants A • Prepare for observation of ARD meeting #1 for Participants B	• Participate in ARD meeting
Week 6	• 1 hour • 3 hours • 1. 5 hours • 1 hour	• Transcription • Observe/videotape ARD meeting #1 for Participants B • Interview Parent B • Interview Admin. B	• Participate in ARD meeting and interview
Week 7	• 7 hours	• Transcription	• Participate in

	• 2.5 hours • 1 hour • 1 hour	• Observe/videotape ARD meeting for Participants C • Interview Parent C • Prepare for observation of ARD meeting #2 for Participants B	ARD meeting and interview
Week 8	• 1 hour • .5 hour • 1 hour	• Observe/videotape ARD meeting #2 for Participants B • Second interview with Parent B • Second interview with Admin. B	• Participate in ARD meeting and interview
Week 9	• 7 hours	• Transcription	• N/A
Week 10	• 2 hours • 1.5 hours • 1 hour	• Observe/videotape ARD meeting #2 for Participants A • Second interview with Parent A • Second Interview with Admin. A	• Participate in ARD meeting and interview
Week 11	• 17 hours	• Transcription	• N/A
Week 12	• 11 hours • 1 hour • 1.5 hours	• Transcription • Schedule member check with all Participants • Individual member checks with Parent Participants	• Participate in member check
Week 13	• 8 hours • 2 hours	• Transcription • Individual member checks with Admin. Participants	• Participate in member check
Week 14	• 12 hours • 2 hours	• Transcription • Schedule follow-up meetings with all Participants	• N/A
Week 15	• 3 hours • 2 hours	• Follow up meeting with each Parent	• Participate in follow-up

		Participant • Follow up meeting with each Admin. Participant	meeting
Ongoing until completion of the study	• Varied & ongoing	• Data Analysis & Peer Debriefing • Writing	• N/A

APPENDIX F

Transcription Key

Symbol	Meaning	Example
Dash	Marks cut off of a word, syllable or phrase	I wan-I think
Brackets	Indicates overlapping speech	AMP: It is important to listen RAP: [listen]
Double parenthesis	Contextual information	Uh huh ((affirmation*))*
Triple arrows	Indicates filled pauses	And so >>> uh I think>>>um
RR	Repetition of word or sound	She Sh RR didn't mean that
Italics in parenthesis	Non-verbal involvement	(*hands on hips*)