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Empowerment Versus Dependency of Parents with Children in Special Education

Wendy J. Fisher

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Empowerment Versus Dependency

of Parents with Children in Special Education
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BY

Wendy J. Fisher

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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Empowerment Versus Dependency
of Parents with Children in Special Education

Wendy J. Fisher

Eastern Illinois University

Running head: EMPOWERMENT VERSUS DEPENDENCY

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Abstract

This study attempted to determine whether parents of children receiving special education services are being empowered by the present special education system or growing dependent on it. A survey was constructed based upon the three criteria deemed necessary by social policy analyst Charles Murray to yield empowerment. The survey was administered by phone to 50 parents of children receiving special education services. Results indicated that primary source of income and expression of participation do not have an impact on degree of empowerment as measured by the Empowerment/Dependency Survey. Severity of handicap did not predict whether or not parents desired additional outside services. Length of time the child received special education services did predict parental satisfaction with the child's education program.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

The passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) and more recently 1986 (P.L. 99-457) have placed emphasis on empowering families in meeting the needs of their disabled children. Parents are now presumably legally provided with the method for greater involvement in the education of their children. However, parents have not fully taken advantage of these opportunities toward greater empowerment. An inquiry is made into the current educational research about whether or not parents are satisfied with the services provided and why parents are not participating more actively. I propose to inquire into whether the special education system will, reveal a systemic dependency that precludes parental empowerment.

Definition of Terms

Definitions are provided at this point to facilitate understanding of the frequently used terms in this thesis. The parent is the biological or adopted mother, father, legal guardian, or person designated as being responsible for the child's welfare. The disabled child is one that meets the eligibility requirements for the provision of special education services.

Empowerment, as it is used here, is defined as the capacity to act on one's own behalf for self-determined needs in which there is risk of possible failure and the resulting outcome is attributed to self. Dependency, on the other hand, is behaving in such a way that limits self-determination and relinquishes ownership for success or failure by placing the responsibility for self on another. Natural dependency is the realization of the fact that there are inherent limitations in the child. Systemic dependency is futility created because of an inability to influence the system in which one must operate.

The definition proposed here for empowerment is more inclusive than others suggested in the literature. It is based upon the writings of social policy analyst Charles Murray and those factors which he deemed necessary for empowerment to exist. The definition consists of not only the family's perceived sense of empowerment, but also the behaviors which would indicate a more objective view of empowerment. According to the definitions of empowerment and dependency proposed here, parents cannot be both empowered and dependent at the same time.

Empowerment is not obtained only in the positive treatment people. It also requires the desired participation of both parties, within a structure that allows it to take place (Murray, 1988). Providing assistance through giving advice would not be empowering

even if the person wanted the advice. If the advice was taken and the success would be attributed to the advisor and not to self. Empowerment would result from when the family recognized the need, put thought into possible solutions and then chose a solution that was able to meet their need.

For example, parents may not refuse special education services for their children if they are dissatisfied, because they are unaware that private services are available. If they are aware of other services, they may not be able to afford those services. The parents are trapped into a system that does not provide other options. The provision of services without any effort put forth on the part of the parents results in the belief that this is yet another area of their lives where they cannot affect change (Murray, 1988).

The purpose of this study is to explore the psychological ramifications of Public Law 94-142, as it affects the dynamics between the parents of children with handicaps and the educational system. P.L. 94-142 and 99-457 have provided an inordinately large amount of funding for special education and related services. Services and/or financial support are now provided for all disabled children and many of their parents as well. The amount spent for special education has grown substantially in the last twenty years. Approximately \$1200 is spent on each child receiving special education services and this is in addition to the

regular education funds provided for the student. Regular education funds provided for each child amount to approximately \$1500 (Unpublished interview with superintendent from and unspecified district in Indiana, 1994) .

An inquiry has been made into current educational research regarding whether or not parents are satisfied with the services provided and why parents are not participating more actively. It was discovered that much conflicting research exists around whether parents are satisfied with their child's education and whether they are actively participating. It has been reported in numerous studies that parents are satisfied with the present educational service delivery model (Lowry, 1983). However, at the same time there is more and more evidence of parental noninvolvement as the children occupy themselves with interests that may not be productive.

Additionally, there is a need to determine if it is only specific groups of parents which are not actively participating and being empowered. It is possible that there is another more pervasive phenomenon occurring which is becoming the trend among the parents of all handicapped children.

I propose to inquire into whether the special education system will reveal a systemic dependency that precludes parental empowerment. According to Murray (1988), systemic

dependency is encouraged through the provision of services without any effort, expenditure, or cost to the parents. It is impossible to empower people who are dependent on the system.

People accept this dependency when they choose not to participate actively. However, individuals can achieve their own empowerment, if they so desire, through active participation. The present system interferes with the healthy functioning of families by not allowing them independence and choice (Murray, 1988).

Parental Involvement

Poor and minority families have been the most minimally involved with the school (Strickland, 1983). It may be that lower socioeconomic status and minority parents are less empowered than higher status nonminority parents. They may lack knowledge, and experience discomfort in school interactions (Anderson & Brentlinger, 1987). There could potentially be a number of reasons why this is occurring. Some parents may desire more active involvement in their child's educational program but they do not believe the school will allow such involvement (Allen & Hudd, 1987). This could be conjecture or reality may be that the schools do not actually desire parental involvement.

Ammer, Littleton, and Rhein (1983) found that eighty-seven percent of the parents of children with handicaps were

not presently involved in the education of their child. Abelson & Metge (1985) report that it is common for parents to not attend educational planning meetings for their child. Some possible reasons for parental lack of involvement include limited information or knowledge, no energy or time available, not interested, preference for role stereotypes, or the fear of intimidation at educational meetings (Lowry, 1983).

If school officials are supporting the federal mandate to involve parents and view them as having a necessary and integral role in the planning process, then parental support would be expected to increase along with greater cooperation between the home and school (Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, and Maxwell, 1978). A growing research base has been established which suggests that this is not what is occurring. Parents may not desire the role of active participant in the education of their handicapped child (Lusthaus, Lusthaus, and Gibbs, 1981).

Many parents appear to prefer minimal or no involvement in the educational planning of their child's future. Those who consider themselves to be active participants continue in the historical roles of either supplying or receiving information (Lusthaus et al., 1981). A discrepancy becomes apparent between what research yields as most beneficial to families and what families desire for themselves.

Some parents may not be accepting ownership of their

responsibility to educate their handicapped child. Instead they have assigned or possibly relinquished this role to the school system (Murray, 1988). They may believe the school is responsible for the educational success or failure of their child. It is also possible that parents may not want to be responsible for the educational level reached by their disabled child. The structure of the system contributes to this psychological divestment by keeping them in dependent and noninfluential positions (Murray, 1988).

Parents may believe they are playing an important part in the education of their child, but make rare contacts with the school. These parents would consider themselves to be actively involved. They may also believe they are actively involved by merely attending and passively agreeing with the decision making of the educators. This person would not be a truly empowered individual because he/or she is not making a meaningful contribution that will allow them to feel proud (Murray, 1988).

P.L. 94-142 is essentially a grant-giving statute which provides financial support to state and local education agencies for special education. To be considered disabled or handicapped the student must meet certain detailed eligibility requirements. In this piece of legislation, parents are given rights to access their child's educational records and to be fully informed of any changes made on the Individualized Educational Plan. In addition, schools must

take the necessary steps to insure that one or both parents will have the opportunity to attend education planning meetings. A planning meeting may only be conducted without the parent if the school is unable to contact the parent after several documented attempts.

Parents of a child who may or will receive special education benefits have certain rights which are safeguarded by state and federal statute. The rights to which the parent is entitled are listed below in abbreviated form under nine headings.

Student Records

The right to inspect and review records; the right to obtain copies of records at no cost, depending on ability to pay; the right to be informed of all types and locations of records being collected, maintained or used by the agency; the right to ask for an explanation of any item in the records; the right to ask for an amendment of any record on the grounds that it is found inaccurate or misleading or that it violates privacy rights; the right to a records hearing if the agency refuses to make the requested amendment.

Confidentiality of Information

The right to restrict access to the child's records by withholding consent to disclose records; the right to be informed before information in your child's file is to be destroyed; the right to be informed as to whom information

has been disclosed.

Notice

The right to receive a written notice at least 10 days prior to the event before the school district initiates or changes (or refuses to initiate or change) the identification, case study evaluation, re-evaluation, or educational placement of the child; the right to have this notice in writing, in your native language, or other principal mode of communication, at a level understandable to the general public; the right to have this notice describe the proposed action, explain why it is proposed, describe the options considered and explain why those options were rejected; the right to be notified of each evaluation procedure, test, record or report the school district used as a basis for any proposed action.

Consent

The right to give consent before an initial case study evaluation is conducted and before initial placement is made in special education; the right to revoke consent at any time by requesting a Level I Due Process Hearing; the right to give consent for any re-evaluation conducted as a required triennial re-evaluation, or conducted with components not included in the most recent case study evaluation.

Evaluation Procedures

The right to have a special education case study

evaluation of the child's educational needs completed within 60 school days of referral; the right to have more than one criterion used in determining an appropriate educational program for your child; the right to have the evaluation conducted which is linguistically, culturally, racially, and sexually nondiscriminatory; the right to have a re-evaluation every 3 years or more frequently if conditions warrant or if the parent or the child's teacher request it.

Independent Evaluation

The right to an independent educational evaluation; the right to have the school district pay for the independent evaluation if it is determined through a due process hearing that the school district's evaluation was not appropriate; the right to be informed of the procedures for obtaining an independent evaluation at no cost; the right to have the independent evaluation considered when placement and program decisions are made; the right to present the results of the independent evaluation at any due process hearing conducted at the request of the parent or the school district.

Least Restrictive Environment

The right to have the child educated with nonhandicapped children to the maximum extent appropriate; the right to have the child removed from the regular education environment only after supplementary aids and services are considered and found insufficient in achieving a satisfactory education in the regular education

environment; the right to have placement in the school the child would attend if nonhandicapped, unless the individualized education plan requires some other arrangement; the right of the child to participate with nonhandicapped children in nonacademic and extra curricular services and activities, such as meals, recess, counseling, clubs, athletics, and special interest groups to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the child.

Complaint Resolution and Mediation

Complaints alleging violations of parent and special education student rights can be referred locally; complaints alleging violations of parent and special education student rights can be referred to the Department of Special Education, the State Board of Education for review, investigation and action within 60 days.

Hearing

The right to request an impartial due process hearing to question the school district's identification, case study evaluation, re-evaluation, or educational placement of the child or to question the district's provision of a free, appropriate public education; the right to be informed of the procedures to follow to make a request for an impartial due process hearing; the right to be informed of any free or low-cost legal and other relevant services available; the right to have the hearing conducted by a person not employed by a public or private agency involved in the diagnosis,

education, or care of the child; the right to see a statement of the qualifications of the hearing officer; the right to be advised and accompanied at the hearing by counsel and to be accompanied by individuals with special knowledge or training in problems of the handicapped; the right to have the child present at the hearing; the right to have the hearing open to the public; the right to present evidence and confront, cross-examine and compel the attendance of witnesses; the right to prohibit the introduction of any evidence at the hearing that has not been disclosed at least five days before the hearing; the right to have a record of the hearing; the right to obtain written findings of fact and a written decision within 45 days after the initial request for the hearing; the right to appeal for a final administrative decision and receive that decision within 30 days of the filing of the appeal; the right to have a hearing and an appeal set at a time which is reasonably convenient to the parent; the right to bring a civil action in court if you disagreed with the decision of a review officer; the right to have the child remain in his or her present educational placement during the time period of the administrative proceeding, unless the parent and district agree otherwise; a request for a due process hearing should state the reason that the hearing is being requested and must be sent to the school district superintendent; the right to seek to recover reasonable

attorney's fees if the parent prevails in a final hearing decision or court action (See Appendix A).

Results of Recent Legislation

Recent legislation has placed more emphasis on the importance of empowering families with a handicapped child. The passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) and 1986 (P.L. 99-457) have been responsible for the marked increase in the emphasis on empowering families in meeting the needs of their disabled children. However, up to this point there has not yet been a measure that accurately determines whether parents are empowered or not. Parents have gained many rights, but it is not known as to whether the goal of empowerment has been reached as a result of this legislation.

P.L. 94-142 emphasizes the role of parents in educational decision making. It affirms the existence of a partnership between parents and the school which is in contrast to the traditional model of the school as the final authority in special education programming decisions (Hoff, Fenton, Yoshida, & Kaufman, 1978).

Parents have now been provided with the opportunity to participate, but for some unknown reasons many of them have chosen not to participate. P.L. 94-142 mandated parental involvement, however the parents may have decided for themselves that this was not necessary.

It is unclear as to whether recent empowerment attempts will result in greater parental involvement. It is possible that recent legislation has influenced parents in such a way that they assume less responsibility for the education of their child with handicaps. It may not be possible to empower other if it means undermining out institutions (Gruber & Trickett, 1987).

Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986 (P.L. 99-457) adds even more consideration and importance to the role of the family in the education of children who are handicapped.

Funding is provided to the families of young handicapped children and parents have more influence over what services are received. P.L. 99-457 provides for the assessment of preschooler's needs and strengths as well as those of their family. Family members are considered team members. Parental contributions are in theory unique, valuable, and necessary for appropriate educational planning. However, the customary practice of treating only the child's needs has been the target of recent criticism in the early childhood literature (Devereux De Luca & Cohen Salerno, 1984).

Thus, recent legislation has not only increased funding, but has also placed more emphasis on the importance of empowering families with a handicapped child. The passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments

of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) and 1986 (P.L. 99-457) have been responsible for the marked increase in the emphasis on empowering families in meeting the needs of their disabled children.

I propose to inquire into whether the special education system will reveal a systemic dependency that precludes parental empowerment. According to Murray (1988), systemic dependency is encouraged through the provision of services without any effort, expenditure, or cost to the parents. It is impossible to empower people who are dependent on the system. People accept this dependency when they choose not to participate actively. However, individuals can achieve their own empowerment, if they so desire, through active participation. The present system interferes with the healthy functioning of families by not allowing them independence and choice (Murray, 1988).

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis of this study is that parents' primary source of income predicts their level of empowerment. Middle and upper income bracket parents are more empowered due to their increased ability to purchase the necessary services. Parents in the lower income bracket are less empowered in comparison with the other two groups. Employed parents are hypothesized to achieve a greater degree of empowerment than unemployed parents who receive

funding from other sources. Those parents which are less empowered are more dependent, thereby more accepting of the services offered by the public school.

Parents who do not pay taxes may be more inclined to believe that educational services are provided due to the need for assistance. Parents who receive financial support from the government may not necessarily believe it is their right to receive services because they have not put forth a financial contribution. If parents do not believe they have the right to receive special education funding, they would achieve low levels of empowerment.

Lower income bracket parents exhibit low levels of empowerment and indicate that they are more dependent on the special education system and its services because they have only the options within the system available to them. They do not have the available funds to seek out private outside services and may not even consider that as an option. Obtaining a second opinion is often considered to be in order for taking appropriate action. However, it is not an option for those who cannot afford one.

High levels of empowerment are not possible for parents in the lower income bracket to achieve due to systemic dependency. The parents are either not able or aware that they can go elsewhere for private educational services.

Middle and upper socioeconomic status (SES) parents are satisfied with the status quo because they have the

financial means to acquire the services they desire. If they do not like the recommendations the school provides they are free and able to get a second opinion from nonschool personnel.

The second hypothesis is that active participation by the parent in the handicapped child's educational program predicts level of empowerment. Parents who participate actively achieve higher levels of empowerment. Active participation in decision making and other educational activities allows parents some control and influence over the education of their child. Active participation is the only means for parents in the lower income bracket to achieve greater empowerment for themselves. Those lower income parents who choose not to participate or who participate minimally (less than 10 contacts), will indicate that they are more dependent on the school system.

Choosing to not participate is an indicator that parents have turned over the responsibility of their child's education to the school. It is not possible for the parents to be empowered in this arena if they have not claimed ownership for their child's education. There may be several reasons that this occurs. Murray (1988), would claim that it is a direct result of systemic dependency.

The third hypothesis is that parents of children with a more severe handicapping condition, are less likely to desire and seek outside services. This occurs because the

more severe handicaps have been visible longer and the parents are more likely to accept the handicap as being chronic.

If parents believe that the handicap is chronic, they accept it as permanent and are less likely to search for outside opinions and services. Parents of children with a less severe handicapping condition often desire other opinions and services because they have not yet accepted that the handicap is not alterable. For example, a parent who discovers that their child has a learning disability in third grade, may not be able to accept that this condition is not alterable.

The parent may want to explore all of their options to find out if there is anything that can be done to free their child of this educational obstacle. A parent in this situation may be extremely disappointed and agitated that professions have not been able to alleviate the child's difficulties. This is an example of a natural dependency because there are limits to what one is capable of accomplishing in the area of the handicap.

The fourth hypothesis is the longer the child has received special education services the more satisfied and accepting the parent appears to be of the child's education plan. This attitude change may occur due to the parent's gradual acceptance and understanding of the child's handicap over time. The satisfaction may actually be resignation

which is caused by an awareness of the inability to influence the system. Those that are despaired by the system do not put forth effort to change the system. This is referred to by Murray (1984) as systemic dependency or exasperation and it occurs within the individual until the system changes.

Over a period of time, the parents realize that the handicapping condition cannot be changed. The parents are then less likely to blame the school for providing inadequate services because they have accepted their child's natural limitations. The less time that the child has received special education services, the more likely it is that the parent will be dissatisfied with those services. Many of these parents may not yet fully realize the limitations of their child's handicap. The less time the child has been in special education and the less severe the handicap, the more likely the parent will be dissatisfied with the services provided. This is due to the parental lack of understanding of the extent or permanence of the handicap. It may take parents a period of time to fully understand the disorder and its manifestations.

Additionally, the thought of refusing special services may place the parents in a moral dilemma. Parents use their best judgement in deciding whether or not to accept the services offered. However, if they refuse the services, they may receive implicit or more explicit pressure from

family, school officials, and community members. Most people accept the services and avoid the risk of being considered negligent in their parenting. For parents who disagree, they are left with little choice other than the expected compliance.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

Family-centered health care practices call for considerable self-determination, autonomy, and control of children's health care on the part of the family. However, research on patterns of health care has consistently produced findings which demonstrate child and parental dependence upon health care providers. Dependency is often induced by certain health care practices designed to assist families (Dunst, Trivette, Davis, & Cornwell, 1988).

A Social Systems Perspective

Dunst, Trivette, & Deal (1988) provide a basis for viewing empowerment from a broad based social systems perspective that suggests that the help provider's behavior is an important aspect of enabling and empowering families.

The parents often do not ask for assistance and they are given a prescription for what they need. This leads them to being angry and noncompliant. Parents become dependent when services are provided at no cost. Noncontingent help giving creates a likely outcome of increased passivity and dependence. By stepping in and making decisions, professionals are saying that they can make better educational planning and other decisions than the parent. Inadvertently, they are saying that parents do not know what they need. There is a debilitating effect

that may elicit negative reactions if professionals see a problem that the parents do not (Dunst et al., 1988).

Professionals may be going one step too far when they attempt to convince parents that their child has a problem and is in need of their assistance (Dunst et al., 1988).

There is greater learned helplessness when help-seekers are made to feel incompetent. There is a greater degree of dependence on help-givers after aid was provided. The more assistance provided if successful, the more people think they need an outsiders assistance.

Emphasis must be placed on the individual's responsibility for the solution. Parents must be given parents the option of services and choices. The family must be responsible for seeing a need and mobilizing resources to meet the need. Assuming responsibility for solutions to problems has been found to be consistently related to positive affect and increased well-being (Dunst et al., 1988). One is less unlikely to find any maintenance of behavior change in situations in which change is attributed to external agents.

It is the role of the family to decide what is in their best interest. Research demonstrates the relationship between needs and family functioning (Dunst et al., 1988). Unless there is an indicated need by the family, there is not a concern regardless of what another individual or organization thinks.

Needs identified by the family regarding their children are inversely related to needs in other areas (Dunst et al., 1988). Families will not indicate that they have needs related to enhancing their child's development until other needs have been met. Parents must be allowed to work at meeting their own pressing needs.

Being supportive of what the parents want resolves conflicts better than coercing or trying to convince the parents about what professionals believe should be done. It also supports their self-sufficiency and capability in making decisions.

Dunst & Trivette (1993) point out that parents who have not requested special education services are having these services pushed on them. This can foster anger and noncompliance on the part of the parents. Parents can become dependent when they receive services at no cost. Noncontingent help-giving sets the stage for increased passivity and dependence.

Dependent people want the school to solve all of their child's problems (Dunst & Trivette, 1993). They feel that their child's disability was not their fault and therefore they should receive help from the government. There is greater learned helplessness when help-seekers are made to feel incompetent and a greater degree of dependence on help-givers after the aid is provided. The more assistance that is provided, the more people think they need outside support

(Dunst & Trivette, 1993). It is less likely to find any maintenance of behavior change in situations in which change is attributed to external agents rather than from the individual seeking help.

By intervening in decision making, professionals are implying that they are more qualified than the parent when making decisions concerning the child. They may give the impression that they feel the parents do not know what their child needs. Some parents may react negatively to this and not accept the services.

Negative reactions may also be elicited if professionals see what they consider to be a problem with the child and they verbalize this to the parents, but the parents do not agree. This can breed resentment on the part of the parents (Dunst & Trivette, 1993).

Lower income bracket parents may not be communicating their disagreement with the school officials because they feel it is "of no use." People will often not speak up when they feel their efforts will be ineffective (Hayes, 1992). Typically, parents accept the services that are offered to them (Garfunkel, 1986).

If it does not matter if the parent disagrees, there is no choice and they must accept the services provided. It is not possible to go elsewhere for assistance. Psychologically, they are not encouraged to stand up and be assertive or voice dissent. Parents may not be able to

turn down the special education services offered because morally it would be viewed as being a negligent parent. This prevents parents from moving out of a system they may no longer need. Dunst & Trivette (1993) emphasize help-seeker responsibility for the solution. The family must be responsible for identifying a need and generating the resources to meet the need. Every parent has the right to decide what is in the best interest for their family. Research shows the relationship between needs and family functioning. Unless the family believes they need assistance, they will not be concerned with what a help-giver thinks of their situation.

Family-identified needs at the child level are inversely related to needs in other areas and until the latter are adequately addressed, a family will not indicate that they have needs related to enhancing their child's development (Dunst & Trivette, 1993).

Murray's views on systemic dependency

Charles Murray is a Bradley Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. He is best known as the author of Losing Ground, the influential and controversial analysis of the economic reforms of the 1960s and a co-author of The Bell Curve, published in 1994.

According to Murray (1984), the problem is not that the government sometimes administers good programs improperly or

that sound concepts are sometimes converted to operations incorrectly. The present condition of the welfare system is not the fault of a specific program, court ruling or act of Congress. The error that was strategic. The goal of welfare and other social programs is not simply to take care of the poor, but to prepare these people to walk out on those who have helped them with the skills and capabilities necessary for self-care (Murray, 1984).

Murray (1988) attempted to separate the problems that will more or less solve themselves in the natural course of events from those that will continue to plague the disadvantaged unless special remedial steps are taken.

When large numbers of people begin to behave differently from ways they have previously behaved, they usually do so for good reason. There is no breakdown of the work ethic in this account of rational choices among alternatives. People who are in need are put in the position of making logical short-term decision making that interferes with logical long-term decision making (Murray, 1988). Their quality of life was demeaned in ways that the added welfare dollars could not compensate.

The definitional properties stipulated as necessary for empowerment to exist in this thesis and by Murray (1988) include voluntary choice, risk of failure, and outcome attributed to self. If the parental responses to any of these suggests that a dependency exists then it may be due

to the limits of a natural dependency or that of a systemic dependency.

Structural poverty is not the fault of the individual, but of the system. The blame is embedded in the structure of the system, and the system must be made right. The recipient of the benefits does not have to change their behavior or values. The solution that results from this faulty line of thinking would be to eliminate poverty by mailing enough checks to enough people (Murray, 1984). In contrast, standing on one's own abilities and accomplishments is of paramount importance in determining the quality of a family's life.

If a systemic dependency exists then one cannot truly be empowered, but one can have some control and influence through active participation. This concept is similar to Murray's concept of labor force participation. Labor force participation measures a fundamental economic stance: an active intention of working, given the opportunity.

Systemic dependency is the opposite of empowerment and it locks the person into a system where they must rely on others to meet their basic needs. Relinquishing ownership of responsibility for self results from dependency. It is an indirect means for meeting one's needs. For example, a poor family with pride is happier and pride depends on self-respect that status within the community can bring. Reducing misery and increasing happiness is indispensable to

deciding whether a social policy is working or failing (Murray, 1988).

The discouraged worker hypothesis is an explanation for part of the reduction in the work force in certain age groups during certain years. During recessions, the reductions in labor force participation (LFP) among the most vulnerable workers are easily seen as discouragement (Murray, 1984).

Among older workers the absolute changes were quite small, however black males born in the early 50's and after had different a approach toward the labor market than that of their fathers and older brothers. This generation behaved differently. They moved in and out of the labor force at precisely that point in their lives when it was most important that they acquire skills, work habits, and a good work record (Murray, 1984). Many of these men also forfeited their futures as economically independent adults.

As sense of empowerment goes down, the belief that it is their right to receive services goes up because it is the only area that they have been able to effect change (Murray, 1988). Demanding more services and more economic funding for special education from the government is a secondary and indirect method of meeting the family's needs. A primary method of meeting the family's needs would be to assume that one is responsible for meeting their own needs. Instead of picking up a check from the government, the family would

unite and make choices about how they could best meet their needs. Empowerment would result as a function of meeting those needs without government support. Dependency on the other hand, would result when one is able to convince others to meet their needs.

In 1988, Murray released his publication which sheds light on the importance of social and family policy in allowing families the means to reach happiness. The book is entitled In Pursuit of Happiness and Good Government and is focused directly on what happens to the family when large amounts of funding are provided. Many of the ideas and suppositions in this thesis directly follow from Murray's theories of what is happening in society today.

Self-respect is an intricate part of empowerment according to Murray (1988). A core concept underlying self-respect is the belief in one's personal responsibility for one's life and the satisfaction that it brings. An operational measure of self-respect is locus of control. This construct is based on the assertion that people vary in the degree to which they see themselves as being responsible for what happens to them.

The key feature of self-respect is acceptance of responsibility for how one measures oneself. That which one deems respectable must be within one's own reach and capability. The nature of the behavior is important only to the extent that the individual believes the pursuit to be

valuable and productive. Self-respect must also be grounded in behavior. Thinking about or verbally expressing who you are or what you want has little meaning if there is no behavioral movement in which to be proud. To discontinue effort on an important goal is to forfeit self-respect.

An operational measure of self-respect is locus of control. A person with an internal locus of control has a well developed sense of personal responsibility and accepts the consequences of those behaviors. Individuals who believe they are in control and act as such are happier. When people are in control of an endeavor, they enjoy it more. People must genuinely be in control of their lives and allowed to feel as such. The compensation is a feeling of effectance and this was sufficient to motivate the behavior (Murray, 1984).

The continuum ranges from the extreme of being highly internal to the opposite extreme of being highly external. Highly internal is the belief that one controls almost everything that happens. A highly external person is one that believes almost everything in life is controlled by luck or outside forces. In terms of self-respect, an internal has a well developed sense of personal responsibility for his or her behavior and the resulting consequences (Murray, 1988).

The intrinsic importance of self-respect is grounded in the acceptance of personal responsibility for one's life and

happiness. People who believe and act as if they are in control, are happier. They function better in a variety of ways that directly line up with enjoying life (Murray, 1988).

There is a correlation between work and happiness and work and life satisfaction (Murray, 1984). A necessary condition for self-respect is the acceptance of responsibility for one's own life and for earning one's own financial resources. Putting forth productivity pays one's bills, offers a payback to society, and allows happiness to be possible. An enabling condition does not cause an event to happen, it permits the event to happen (Murray, 1984). A government can make it possible for people to be happy, but they cannot create happiness for them.

Four extremely important conditions necessary for the pursuit of happiness are material resources, safety, self-respect, and the passage to enjoyment to pursue happiness (Murray, 1988). People pursue happiness. It is not possible for governments to achieve this pursuit. This is true because only individuals can determine what will make them happy. Those endeavors that the government chooses not to involve itself in are as critically important to the enabling of the pursuit of happiness as the goals that they actively attempt to accomplish. The symptom of poverty can be alleviated by material resources, but material resources do not create happiness. Murray (1984) proposes that

"When a policy trade-off involves imposing material hardship in return for some other policy good, it is possible that imposing the material hardship is the right choice" (p.84).

Murray's concept of personal responsibility is referred to as ownership in this thesis. Ownership and effort are the mechanisms for achieving satisfaction (Murray, 1988). The satisfaction one takes from an activity is a complex product of the degree of effort one put forth, the degree of ownership one has for the outcome, and the function it serves.

Ownership or personal responsibility requires emphasis. There are three crucial underlying conditions. The first is that it was a voluntary choice to participate or take part in the project. If the parent does not conclude for him or herself that a need exists then it does not. The second condition is the willingness to work toward an identifiable end or goal and then follow through with it. The third condition is that it was entirely possible that the project could have failed. It is not necessary to be responsible for every aspect of the project or product. However, there must some meaningful portion that one claims as his or her own (Murray, 1988).

If either effort or ownership is missing then the final product is not of personal value. Effort is important because satisfaction is rarely achieved from anything that does not require effort. The effort one puts into a project

is often directly proportionate to the satisfaction one takes away when the project is finished. Dissatisfaction may be the result if either effort or responsibility is forced (Murray, 1988).

Function is the final component of satisfaction. The degree of satisfaction produced by effort and ownership depends on the importance or function being served. A project considered to be of trivial importance would yield less satisfaction than that which is considered profound. To exist and be vital individuals and groups must have some important function (Murray, 1988).

Murray (1988) contends that the importance of rich affiliations filled with responsibility and effort and used in accordance with one's own beliefs transcends any singular societal goal. Much of the emptiness, discontent, and unhappiness in the present time period may be linked to the many ways that social policy has entered into and taken over responsibility for taking the trouble out of our pursuits.

Transfers of money are inherently treacherous. Taxing the working and giving to the nonworking increases the benefits associated with not working and thus creates more unemployed (Murray, 1988). According to the law of unintended rewards, any social transfer increases the net value of being in the condition that prompted the transfer. Any situation that is substantially supported will become more desirable.

The recipient of welfare is not acting completely involuntarily. People choose to stay on welfare because of its benefits, but they are often not seeing its deficiencies. Applying for and accepting the check are the behaviors that make it voluntary to a certain extent.

These chosen behaviors lock them into a system that promotes dependency because the parents cannot go elsewhere for services. When parents assume that professionals are needed to solve their problems, a dependency forms.

The actions of dependent people preclude the possibility of meeting their own needs directly. It may not be possible to empower people if they are poor, they must empower themselves. The possible monetary incentive encourages people to fight for more benefits and services. For example, if parents are intermittently reinforced they will continue to pursue services for financial reward.

According to Murray (1984), the processes that produce human enjoyment are closely connected to challenge, competency, and autonomy. Individual challenge, risk, and reward work against the rationale for centralized solutions to present societal problems. Governments collapse when a faction is able to use their power to impose its vision upon the entire society.

The role of the government concerning initiating the pursuit of happiness in families ultimately depends, not on the nurturing of individuals but on supporting the

associations they form. It is not appropriate for governments to tell individuals what it considers important, but it can support the organizations which are forming due to the efforts of many individuals.

Complex functions performed by strongly bound communities are not created by government. They are created by the needs of individuals within the community. People have needs that can only be met through and in connection with others. The provision of a check would not meet relational and self-efficacy needs.

Murray (1984) states "The satisfaction one takes from any activity is a product of the degree of effort one puts into it, the degree of responsibility one has for the outcome, and the function it serves" (p.265). The function is the importance that it serves for the individual. The conditions that shape individual satisfaction, also apply to those gained from group affiliations. In order to exist and be vital, people must have something in which to occupy their time.

Technology allows us to make things less difficult, but there are some things that are worth taking the time and trouble to pursue (Murray, 1984). When the difficulty or effort is taken out of a pursuit, there is a corresponding diminution in the potential satisfaction that might have been achieved if the effort had been put forth. Governments must limit what they do for people so that individuals and

families can accomplish goals, do for themselves and pursue their own happiness. Life can be difficult and the ability to cope is a great accomplishment, which can create a sense of pride.

People tend to be satisfied with the services currently provided by the government and those dependent on the services tend to want more services (Murray, 1984). The government has assumed responsibility for taking care of a variety of human needs. This has fostered a dependency in some individuals. Advocacy contributes to dependency because other people may still be making decisions for the parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Instead of empowering, it is caretaking for an adult just as one would do for a child. Caretaking meets some needs while others go unfulfilled which interferes with the pursuit of happiness.

Murray (1984) argues for a system in which the government stops making judgments about what other people need, and stops compelling others to live by those judgments. The goal is to provide families with the enabling conditions for pursuing happiness. Murray (1984) states "The more short-term encouragement and pressure on them to become self-sufficient in the long-term the better for the family" (p.290). Unless obstructed, people will continually make small, incremental changes in their lives that assist in their pursuit of happiness and the means by

which they accomplish this is voluntary affiliations with other people.

Natural Dependency

In a natural dependency the parents options are limited due to the boundaries of the child's handicap. Certain natural boundaries such as limited intelligence and severe handicaps cannot be crossed.

The more aggressive parents believe the educational system will not provide services unless it is sued. They may believe their child has abilities that have not yet been tapped into by the school. This may be a sign that they cannot accept the child's handicap. On the surface, this parent may appear empowered because they speak up at planning meetings and will not take "no" for an answer. This may be yet another signal of the parents' dependency because the parents see the problems as belonging to the school instead of themselves. The parents may not be willing to accept responsibility for their child's difficulties. Unrealistic expectations for the school is an important indicator of a natural dependency.

Natural dependency is the realization of the fact that there are inherent limitations in the child. It is a boundary of nature. There are no means to alter a natural dependency. Therefore, it is possible to have a dependent parent in a soundly structured system. Demanding parents are often those who do not realize the natural dependency of their child's handicap. They may have not accepted the

child's handicap or do not fully understand it. A parent who has realized their child's natural limitations experiences empowerment if they have made changes where changes are possible. They understand that they can effect change and positive growth in certain ways but that some things are beyond their control.

Home/School Interaction

It is important to school officials that parents of children who receive special assistance be satisfied with the services provided. Positive relations with parents are always desired and welcomed, but they are also important because the more satisfied the parent, the less likely they are to request due process hearings when there is a conflict. Districts are often willing to make adjustments in recommendations that would allow them to avoid the high cost of hearings.

Satisfaction of the parents however is not always possible. It may be quite a dilemma for educators when pleasing the parent is inconsistent with what would seem to be in the child's best interest. The issue of who determines "the best interest of the child" arises.

School personnel have not routinely included families in the process of educating their children (Carlson & Sincavage, 1987). Parents are an underutilized resource that has yet to be discovered. Using parents as a resource

may advance the academic achievement and social well-being of children by teaching parents to educate their children (Kramer, 1987).

Family-Centered Approach

Educators have long recognized that the child functions more effectively with greater parental involvement (Devereux De Luca & Cohen Salerno, 1984). In addition, the family as a whole is more satisfied with their child's education when parents become active participants (Turnbull, 1983).

The result of this research has been a shift toward family-centered assessment and planning which focuses on family empowerment (Devereux De Luca & Cohen Salerno, 1984). The family-centered approach to providing services for a child with a disability focuses on habilitation of the child as a family member. The main goal for the family-centered approach is acceptance of the concept that the handicapping condition is as much a part of the child as the child is a part of the family. Habilitation of the handicapping condition alone is viewed as insufficient. The emotional growth and development of the child with a handicap resides in a matrix of teaching and learning combined in a supportive program set up for the child, parents and teachers (Devereux De Luca & Cohen Salerno, 1984). Studying or working with each individually would limit the resulting information.

Habilitation is directed toward improving the child's level of functioning and is possible only when the child has the necessary support. This support becomes a reality only when family members are able to develop a comprehensive understanding of their handicapped child (Devereux De Luca & Cohen Salerno, 1984).

A comprehensive understanding of the handicapped child involves seeking out information available about the handicap from libraries, schools, medical professionals and any other resource they may locate. Daily involvement with the child helps one to gain a better understanding of those tasks that are more complicated or difficult for the child to master. It also allows an understanding of those aspects of the child that may not be affected by the handicap. Teachers and individuals who spend time with the child will develop a more complete understanding of that child.

The emotional stability of the family is of primary importance in the overall development of the child with a handicap (Devereux De Luca & Cohen Salerno, 1984). The child is part of a family system that must cope with difficulties related and unrelated to the handicapping condition. The child's handicap affects family members much in the same way that family members affect the child.

If family-centered approaches continue to be desirable and we strive for empowerment as our goal, then there is a need for instruments to evaluate the effects of current

programs on the family (Devereux De Luca & Cohen Salerno, 1984). Until recently there have been no instruments to evaluate family empowerment intervention outcomes (Cochran & Dean, 1991).

In loco parentis

In loco parentis is a legal term by which a person other than the natural parent is given the right to care for the child and determine what is in the child's best interest. Historically, it was used only when the natural parent was not present or otherwise determined to be unfit to make decisions that were in the best interest of their child (Fellman, 1984).

At this point in time, education professionals are required to act with the best interest of the child in mind. This was likely a development resulting from the recent child rights' movement (Devereux De Luca & Cohen Salerno, 1984). If professionals are assuming that they know what is best for the child then they are acting in loco parentis without the determination that the parents are unfit to make such decisions. In supporting the rights of children we are essentially lessening the rights of their parents.

When government officials or education professionals are making the important decisions, they are implying that the parents cannot make them and do not know what is in the

best interest of their child. This may not be a correct assumption to make though; we have not found the technological means to replace the loving support of a family. This movement has occurred so gradually that parents do not see that their rights are being taken away (Murray, 1992).

Linking Murray's Foundation to Special Education

In education, and specifically special education the government and school affiliations have taken over the role of providing an education for the young. This has been done to such an extent that parents may even consider it their right to have education provided. This is a burden and responsibility that the government has taken over. It is no longer absolutely necessary to take ownership for the education of our children because this is a role that many parents are willing to relinquish. If parents turn this role over to another such as the school then they are no longer responsible for the outcome. It takes away some of the burden and potential to fail as a parent in this area.

It is yet another area that people may choose to not exercise their control. The more areas and responsibilities that we let go of and the government assumes, the more that the consequences are out of the individual's control. To put it even more simply, the more that is done for us, the less we do and are able to do for ourselves.

In special education, it is common to hear education professionals tell parents that a problem exists with the education of their child. In some cases the parent may not even be aware that there is such a problem or may attribute the problem to some other cause. A multidisciplinary team agrees to evaluate the child at some point in the near future and then a meeting is held to discuss the prescribed adjustments. The parents are offered few if any choices and may even feel morally obligated to accept those recommendations. The government and school are considered to have professional expertise that is not to be questioned.

In the public sector, there is no option of shopping around for a second and third opinion to make an informed decision because it is too expensive. It would generally be considered good parenting to explore service options for other needs, but that message is not conveyed in the education environment.

The present situation is a result of what Murray (1988) would label as systemic dependency. The government takes over control and individuals have more difficulty taking back control to satisfy their individual preferences. The system is set up in such a way that people are led to believe that they must follow along and support that which is given to them in the expected and prescribed manner.

By performing certain behaviors that prevent the

possibility of providing for their basic needs, they provide for their needs either proximally or remotely. When parents expend much effort fighting for needed services they are using valuable time that could be spent providing for their own needs.

Those that are despaired by the system do not put forth effort to change the system. This is referred to by Murray (1988) as systemic dependency or exasperation. It is within the individual and will not change unless the system does.

We know involvement is a precursor to empowerment and it is necessary to educate children. Murray (1988) proposes that empowerment include the voluntary choice of the means to satisfy needs, the ability to risk failure, and a self-attributed outcome. There must be this opportunity for the parents of children with handicaps also.

The results of increased empowerment would lead to satisfaction on the part of the parents, which would contribute to happiness, intrinsic rewards, feelings of self-efficacy, and the ability to communicate assertively (Murray, 1988).

Murray (1988) proclaimed that people must be allowed to decide where and when they choose to intervene because involuntary action produces dissatisfaction. Controlling how parents contribute to their child's education prevents them from experiencing the benefits of their own input. Parents must be able to determine what is in the best

interest for their family as a whole. They must put forth effort toward their own needs and believe that they are capable of meaningful involvement in their child's education. It is the parent's responsibility to determine the importance of their child's education.

People must be provided with the education and means to make decisions for themselves, instead of allowing others to intervene and make the decisions for them (Murray, 1988). This would mean training the parents so they are capable of accomplishing what is currently being accomplished by the schools. Parents do not request this information on how to better educate their children though, they request behavior management techniques (Dangel, 1988).

Parents do not request educational assistance or special assessment information. Special education information ranked low on services sought from the school (Dangel, 1988). They may have decided that the child cannot be educated to the extent desired, but perhaps they can be trained. They request behavior management techniques from the school much more frequently.

Parents do not feel empowered because they have no choice other than to rely on the judgement of school personnel. This is because parents do not have the option of seeking out a second opinion or other services. Parents will only be empowered if they have the choice of whom to obtain services from and the option to accept or reject

these opinions. For the lower Socioeconomic parents of handicapped students, the school functions like a monopoly because there is neither options nor competition between service providers.

Parents who have access to other parents with children involved in special education can be empowered or not empowered by this relationship. The other parents can assist in conveying the means for enhancing communication and more active participation. Conversely, if they are in contact with special education parents who are not empowered and believe it is futile to attempt participation in the special education system, these parents would likely take on a similarly dependent role.

Supplemental Security Income

There are monetary benefits available to some parents of handicapped children. Under the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, children with disabilities can receive benefits. Monetary benefits are provided through the Social Security Administration to assist families whose children often qualify for special education services. Monetary support is provided through Social Security when the handicap is considered severe and when there is undue financial hardship. The presence of a handicap has already been established with students receiving special education services, so if the child's parents earn a low income they

will often receive the stipend. The amount of the stipend is not determined based on the specific handicap nor is it determined by the severity of it.

Families may be eligible for these benefits even if the handicap causes the parents no additional expense. Parents tend to view the stipend as free money because their child has a handicap or condition that interferes with the child's education. Many parents may come to believe that since their child has an educational handicap they deserve to be compensated. The government and educational system are presently supporting this belief and are taking over more responsibility for the child.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

SURVEY CONSTRUCTION

The Empowerment/Dependency questionnaire was constructed because the existing surveys proposed to measure empowerment were considered incomplete and therefore insufficient. Existing surveys defined and measured the construct of empowerment in a different manner. It seemed crucial to develop a survey that was consistent with the definitional properties deemed necessary by Charles Murray (1988). It was necessary to create a survey that adhered to all necessary aspects of empowerment in order to properly adhere to Murray's theoretical foundation.

It was determined that a scale which yielded degrees of empowerment would be necessary to express more and less empowered. A certain amount of empowerment is considered possible through active participation. Murray (1988) referred specifically to labor force participation as providing the means to achieve a certain amount of empowerment in supporting one's self and family so as not to need government support.

Eight questions were used to determine level of empowerment. Those eight questions were deemed necessary to fully assess the three necessary components of empowerment.

The demographic information included on the survey

consisted of the child's handicapping condition, the number of years that the child has received special education services, number of contacts with the school last year, employment status of the parent, recipient status of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for the handicapped child, racial background of the parent, and whether or not the child resides with both birth parents (See Appendix B).

It is important to clarify that the data gathered is not only perceptions, but also a request for past behaviors. Parents may state that they are actively involved and highly influence the education of their child in special education, when in fact they are playing only a minimal role in the decision making. The attitudes of parents gives us useful information, but the actual behaviors of parents reveal to us whether an actual dependency exists. Parents may profess to being actively involved, but the involvement and participation may only translate to one actual contact with the school.

Active participation is considered to be at least ten parental contacts with the school. These contacts may be visits to speak with school personnel, mail inquiries, or phone calls which are directly related to the education of the handicapped child. A specific number of contacts is requested due to the ambiguity of what parents' consider to be active participation. The decision to stipulate 10

parental contacts as being necessary to satisfy the requirements of active participation was reached after informally surveying 15 education professionals. The group consisted of five elementary school principals, five district administrators and five school psychologists. The average number of contacts deemed necessary to achieve active participation was ten.

The answer choices for questions that did not pertain to demographics were "yes" and "no." A third category was created for informants that did not feel they could respond appropriately with either a yes or no answer. Questions that include information about a third category typically represent a response similar to "don't know," or "maybe." The only exception to this response pattern was question thirty-one. For this question, the more appropriate choice of response choice was "increased," "decreased," or "stayed the same." A limited number of informants were given this question because the answer to the previous question determined whether or not it was applicable.

The survey questions created to assess the area of voluntary choice for parents of children with handicaps include: 8) Would you like the option of having nonschool personnel assess your child?, 9) Are private services available for child assessment? and 18) Would you feel pressure from others if you chose not to receive the special education services recommended for your child?

Risk of failure means that there must be an opportunity to not succeed in meeting a goal. If it is not possible to fail then it is equally not possible to fully succeed and be empowered. Risk of failure is represented in parents of children with handicaps by the following two questions: 20) Would your child receive a good education if you did not actively participate? and 21) Does parental participation influence the educational performance of the child?

Outcome attributed to self is assessed in questions: 11) Are you the most important educator of your child? 12) Is it the school's responsibility to educate your child? and 22) Did you play an important part in the educational planning for your child? The outcome of meeting or not meeting a goal or need must be attributed to self. If the parent achieved success in meeting a need with the necessary assistance or guidance from another then they cannot attribute success fully to themselves. If success cannot be attributed to self then empowerment does not occur.

A number of questions were created to gain information about those antecedent variables that are hypothesized by Murray (1988) to influence empowerment. Other than specific demographic information that was already listed, questions such as those that follow were asked: 5) satisfaction with teacher, 6) satisfaction with assessment team, 10) desires and concerns given enough importance, 16) perception of whether the school would allow greater participation, 17)

whether or not other parents assisted with participation, 23) involvement encouraged by school personnel, 13) perception of active participation, 3) number of contacts with school last year. See Appendix B for a complete ordinal listing of survey questions.

Other questions were asked to gain information about the consequences that Murray (1988) hypothesized to be the result of empowerment and dependency. Questions that were created for this purpose include: 4) child getting a good education, 26) could change child's education plan, 24) comfortable speaking up at staffings, 25) frustrated when attempt active participation, and 27) angry that school cannot improve child's handicap. See Appendix B for a complete listing. Information sought in this study will likely determine whether an attitudinal or factual dependency exists in the parents of children who receive special education services.

Participants

The survey was administered by telephone to 50 families receiving special education services within one school district in a midwestern community with a population of about 70,000. An introduction letter to the survey was mailed to 100 parents, approximately one week before the telephone call. The purpose of this letter was to express the importance of the up and coming telephone survey and to present my credentials and school affiliation to assure the

validity of the call. The letter also attempted to assure the potential respondents of their anonymity. The sample was drawn systematically from the active special education files. Every tenth file was selected and the information collected included: parental name on the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and most current address and telephone number.

Eighty-seven phone calls were placed before reaching the desired number of 50 participants. Several of the phone numbers had been disconnected and only one person refused to participate in the study. When the parent was reached by phone and participation was granted, the identifying information was discarded and information provided was assigned to a respondent number to assure anonymity. The parent who signed the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was the one parent from each household solicited for the survey due to their past familiarity and involvement with the school.

Scoring

For the purposes of this study, children with handicaps such as learning disabilities and those receiving speech services were grouped into the category of mildly handicapped. Those children with intellectual impairments and multiple handicaps were grouped into the category of severely handicapped.

Survey questions numbered eight, nine, eleven, twelve,

eighteen, twenty, twenty-one and twenty-two were used to calculate a score of empowerment. Questions 12, 18, and 20 were recoded so that a score of 1 indicated of greater empowerment and the score of 0 indicated lesser empowerment. These eight survey items addressed the necessary components of empowerment as stipulated by Charles Murray (1986).

A scale of 0-8 points represented the continuum of possible responses to these eight questions stipulated above. The survey respondent received one point for each question that they responded to in a manner that indicated empowerment. No points were given for responses that were indicative of lesser empowerment. The scores on these specific eight items were then totaled for each respondent. The total score represents degree of empowerment. Higher scores suggest greater empowerment and lower empowerment or dependency.

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter is divided in four major sections. Within the chapter, these sections are as follows; 1) The first section presents the results of whether or not parents' primary source of income predicts their level of empowerment. 2) The second section presents the results of whether the expression of active parental participation in the child's educational program predicts level of empowerment. 3) The third section presents the results of whether parents of children with a more severe handicapping condition, are more likely to accept the handicap as being chronic and therefore less likely to desire outside services. 4) The fourth section of this chapter presents the results of whether the length of time that the child receives special education services predicts parental satisfaction with their child's education program. 5) The fifth and final section includes the results of the overall level of empowerment by survey participants and an analysis of other relevant data which was collected on the Empowerment/Dependency Survey.

Primary Source of Income

A t-test comparing the average empowerment score between working and nonworking parents was not significant

($t=.276$, $p>.05$). It appears that working parents do not respond to the specific survey items used to determine degree of empowerment on the Empowerment/Dependency survey in such a way that is significantly different from nonworking parents. Primary source of income was not related to degree of empowerment.

Active Participation

Participants were divided into categories of those who participated actively and those who participated inactively in their child's school activities. Those parents who made at least 10 contacts with the school last year regarding their child's education were considered to have participated actively. Parents who expressed that they made less than 10 contacts with the school were considered to have participated inactively. The average empowerment score for actively participating parents was compared to the average empowerment score for the inactively participating parents. A t-test used to compare the mean empowerment scores between the two groups was not significant ($t = .24$, $p>.05$). In this study, number of parental contacts with the school last year was not related to degree of empowerment.

Handicapping Condition

Participants were divided into the categories of mildly handicapped and severely handicapped. Parents of children

with learning disabilities and those receiving speech services were determined to be in the mildly handicapped group. Parents of children with intellectual deficits, multiple impairments or medical handicaps were determined to be in the severely handicapped group. The two groups were compared to determine if one group desired outside services from nonschool personnel more than the other group. In this study, severity of handicap is not significantly associated with desire for outside services ($\text{Chi-square} = .22$). There is essentially no relationship between handicapping condition and interest in obtaining outside services.

Length of Time in Special Education

For the fourth hypothesis, participants were divided into categories according to the length of time that their child has received special education services. Participants were divided into three categories. The first group consisted of those parents whose children received three years of special education or less. The second group consisted of those parents whose children received three to five years of special education. The third group consisted of parents whose children received five or more years of special education services. The three groups were compared using the Chi Square test to determine if there was a difference between the groups on satisfaction with their child's education.

In this study, length of time in special education is

associated with parental satisfaction in their child's education to a significant degree (Chi-square = 5.83, $p = .05$). Phi = .3415 tells us that parents who have had children in special education longer are more satisfied than those who have not received services as long (See Table 1 below).

Table 1
Comparison of length of time in special education system to parental satisfaction with child's education.

	yes		no		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<3 years	2	(50)	2	(50)	4	(8)
3-5 years	15	(93.8)	1	(6.3)	16	(32)
5+ years	19	(63.3)	11	(36.7)	30	(60)

Empowerment data

The result of the eight questionnaire items used to determine overall level of empowerment for the entire sample yielded these results. There were no parents that obtained the lowest empowerment score of zero. Similarly, there were no parents who obtained the highest empowerment score of eight. Therefore, the scale of obtained scores extended between one and seven. The distribution of overall level of empowerment appears to be in the shape of a normal bell curve.

Two percent of the total sample of 50 obtained the

score of one. Four percent obtained the score of two; 16% obtained the score of three; 30% obtained the score of four; 30% also obtained the score of five; 14% obtained the score of six; and 4% obtained the score of seven (See table 2 below).

Table 2
Overall level of empowerment for survey participants.

Empowerment Score	f	%
0	0	0
1	1	2
2	2	4
3	8	16
4	15	30
5	15	30
6	7	14
7	2	4
8	0	0
	50	100%

Related Information

Item percentages were calculated for all individual survey items to assess the totality of information provided by survey participants. The information gathered is considered to be either demographic in nature, antecedents of empowerment status or consequences of empowerment status. The questions are listed here in an abbreviated form. Many

of the survey items were expected to be answered with either yes or no. For those parents who decided that some questions could not be answered in this manner, a third category was added which consisted of responses such as "maybe" or "don't know."

Demographic Information

1. name of handicap	mild = 76%	severe = 24%
2. years in special ed	<5 = 8%	3-5 = 32% 5+ = 60%
3. contacts last year	<10 = 52%	10+ = 48%
28. employed	yes = 62%	no = 38%
29. live w/ both parents	yes = 32%	no = 68%
32. SSI benefits for child	yes = 34%	no = 66%
33. race	black = 22%	white = 72% hispanic = 4% other = 2%

Definitional Properties

8. like nonschool assessment of child	yes = 46%	no = 48%	maybe = 6%
9. are private services available	yes = 40%	no = 20%	dk = 40%
11. you are most imp educator of child	yes = 52%	no = 46%	dk = 2%
12. school's responsibility to educate child			

Empowerment
68

yes = 62% no = 24% both = 14%

18. pressure from others yes = 40% no = 56% dk = 4%

20. good ed if not actively participating

yes = 48% no = 50% dk = 2%

21. participation influences ed performance yes = 86% no=14%

22. important part in ed planning of child yes = 88% no= 12%

Antecedents of Empowerment Status

5. satisfied w/ teacher yes = 70% no = 20% sometimes = 10%

6. satisfied w/ assessment team yes = 86% no = 6% dk = 8%

10. desires given enough importance at school

yes = 62% no = 24% dk = 14%

15. like to be more involved yes = 40% no = 60%

16. school allow more active participation

yes = 80% no = 6% dk = 14%

17. other parents assisted yes = 10% no = 90%

19. put great effort into ed of child

yes = 80% no = 18% dk = 2%

23. involvement encouraged by school

yes = 66% no = 30% dk = 4%

Consequences of Empowerment Status

4. child getting a good ed yes = 72% no = 28%

7. trust assessment team yes = 88% no = 8% dk = 4%

24. comfortable speaking up at ed planning meetings

yes = 76% no = 24%

25. frustrated when attempt active participation

yes = 54% no = 46%

26. could change ed plan yes = 56% no = 18% dk = 26%

27. angry school cannot improve handicap

yes = 30% no = 66% dk = 4%

30. know that parent participation is required by law

yes = 24% no = 76%

31. participation has increased, decreased or stayed the
same because it is required

increased = 4% decreased = 4% stayed the same = 16%

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This is the first scale attempting to measure the elusive construct of empowerment based on Murray's views of empowerment. Murray's theories about the current state of welfare in this country were been applied to another area similarly affected by social policy, special education. People seem to agree that parents and people in general need to be empowered. However, while the federal legal mandates appear to offer parents many options for empowerment, the parents may not be taking advantage of those opportunities.

This study may have provided only a limited amount of new information in the results of its hypotheses; however the additional information gathered which is related to the empowerment issue sheds new light on parental beliefs and their associated behaviors.

Hypothesis one stated that parents' primary source of income predicts their level of empowerment. Employed parents were hypothesized to achieve a greater degree of empowerment than unemployed parents who receive funding from other sources. However, in this study the employed parents did not indicate a higher degree of empowerment than the unemployed parents.

Socioeconomic level may have been a better predictor of level of empowerment. Middle and upper income bracket parents may be more empowered due to their increased ability to purchase necessary services. A floor effect may have occurred when employment status was used instead of income level. The sample may have consisted mainly of lower income bracket parents, some of which were working and some of which were not. The community from which the sample was taken tends to be regarded as a "blue-collar" community. If this is true, then neither working nor nonworking groups were able to consider additional services.

According to Murray, a systemic dependency occurs when people do not have the choice to refuse services and go elsewhere for them. Forty-six percent of respondents were interested in obtaining a second opinion or additional outside services. Only 40% knew that these services were available. Sixty percent either did not know if outside services exist or believed that they did not exist.

Another limitation of the study may have been that the questions created to assess degree of empowerment may have not accurately represented the three necessary components of empowerment as stipulated by Murray (1988).

The second hypothesis was that active participation by the parent in the handicapped child's educational program predicts level of empowerment. Those parents who participated actively were hypothesized to achieve a greater

degree of empowerment than those who participated inactively. However, the actively participating parents did not indicate levels of empowerment that were significantly different from those parents who were inactive.

Active participation in decision making and other activities allow parents some control and influence over their child's educational plan. Active participation may still be the only means available for low income parents to achieve greater empowerment.

The results may have been due to the inaccurate specification of questionnaire items in representing the three necessary components of empowerment. Additionally, the specification of 10 contacts may not have been accurate or what was considered to be a school contact may have not been expressed clearly to the respondents.

Almost half of the respondents did not believe they were the most important educator of their child and only 24% believed that the school was not responsible for their child's education. Many of these parents have not claimed ownership and responsibility for their child's education. The empowerment hypotheses were not supported in this study, however the information gained in percentages of responses is not in conflict with Murray's theories.

Parents are becoming more and more overwhelmed in providing for their families financial needs (Lowry, 1983). As parents resources and energies are becoming depleted,

less time is available to spend on parenting. Parents are not taking responsibility for how their children are turning out (Murray, 1988). The school and government cannot be expected to take over this role because there is no continuous personal link with the child. Parents need to reclaim ownership and responsibility for their children if society is going to change for the better.

We must provide the parents the means to educate and make decisions for their child instead of stepping in and paying for other such professionals to make the decisions. We must assume that the parents can make decisions about the best interest of their child. The family will remain when the professionals move on to other children and other efforts.

The third hypothesis was that parents of children with a more severe handicapping condition are less likely to desire and seek outside services from nonschool personnel. However, those parents who have children in the severely handicapped group requested outside services to a similar degree as those with children in the mildly handicapped group.

It is possible that parents are not accepting the severe handicaps as being permanent and they are continuing to seek outside services as much as those who want assistance with the milder handicaps. Children with severe handicaps need more services than what the school can

reasonably provide. By dividing the children into two groups with certain handicaps in each group, the information about the actual severity of the particular child's handicap is not obtained. Having additional information about services received would likely be a more accurate determination of handicap severity. It is not possible to determine whether outside services were required for individual children based on the questions asked in this survey.

Thirty percent of the respondents indicated that they were angry that the school was unable to improve their child's handicap. These parents would be experiencing the limits of a natural dependency. They lack the information that certain educational handicaps cannot be cured and that is what makes them a handicap. These parents have unrealistic expectations for the school. The school may partly be at fault for not providing the parent with enough education.

The fourth hypothesis was that the longer the child has received special education services, the more satisfied the parent appears to be with the child's education program. The chi-square nonparametric statistic revealed that parents of children who had been in special education for five years or more were more satisfied with their child's education program than those parents whose child had not received services for as long.

This may be an attitude change that commonly occurs over time due to the parent's gradual acceptance and understanding of the child's handicap over time. It is possible that these specific individuals were more satisfied than the other individuals in the sample.

From Murray's perspective, the satisfaction may actually be resignation which is caused by an awareness of the inability to influence the system. Parents may state that their child is getting a good education because if they believed that he or she were not it would imply that some action, change, or effort on their part would be required.

The results from the overall level of empowerment in the sample were inconclusive. It is difficult to come to any firm conclusions or even make any assertions about the overall level of empowerment of participants with children receiving special education services. It is not clear whether the Empowerment/Dependency scale is an accurate measure of parental empowerment. Therefore, the absence or presence of a systemic dependency in special education has yet to be revealed.

Special education is similar to the welfare system in that we keep adding more and more money and expecting people to be taking care of themselves better and functioning at a higher level. We may in fact be crippling more and more families by making them eligible for free services. These people will then believe it is their right to receive

services and are indeed entitled to even more services. For example, there are parents requesting extra monetary benefits for their learning disabled child when it costs no more to be the parent of a learning disabled child than any other child.

Additional information provided from the survey results include the interesting finding that 38% of the sample was unemployed. Thirty-four percent of the parents get SSI benefits for their child and only 32% of the children with handicaps live with both birth parents.

Almost half of the respondents believed that they were not the most important educator of their child and only 24% believed that the school was not responsible for the child's education. Fifty percent of the parents expressed that their child would get a good education even if they did not actively participate in it.

Forty-percent thought they would feel pressure from others if they made the decision to withdraw their child from special education services. There are apparently plenty of people who do not believe that the parents can make the best choices for their children. Only 11% of the sample knew that their participation in their child's education program was required by law.

Fifty-four percent of the parents get frustrated when they attempt to actively participate in their child's education. The schools need to put forth effort to get

parents involved. The children will benefit educationally and society will benefit from having parents take more responsibility for their children.

Future Recommendations

If this vein of research is pursued further it is recommended that Murray's three components of empowerment be used strictly to assess welfare dependency. It was premature to apply the prescribed principles of empowerment to special education when they have not yet been applied to the area they were designed to explain.

If it is determined that each of these three components can be accurately assessed and quantified in survey form, then one might consider their application to special education and other areas of social policy. Murray provides an interesting and plausible perspective on the causes of social ill in society and suggests how we might consider viewing problems before attempting to remedy them. However, the attempt to quantify and measure the intricate parts of social theory is as nebulous as the definition of empowerment itself.

In addition to reassessing the questions used to determine empowerment, further information about whether parents believe their child has a handicap should be sought. While administering the surveys, some of the participants seemed unsure as to whether they considered their child to be handicapped.

This attempt to create a survey that measures empowerment is a beginning step at applying Murray's social theories to special education policies. More research in the areas of social and education policy will hopefully yield information that can be used to reshape federal policies in ways that allow people to function successfully as individuals and families without unnecessary governmental intervention.

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APPENDIX A

Underutilized Parental Rights

1. Parents can have input as to the date and time of staffings.
2. Parents can refuse testing.
3. Parents can have a copy of the reports made on their child.
4. Parents can have more input as to where and by whom their child is educated.
5. Parents can demand that the evaluation occurs within the required time limits.
6. Parents can demand that their child not be suspended before a relatedness hearing is held.
7. Parents can expect a meeting time which reasonably accommodates their needs.
8. Parents can hold the school accountable for not adhering to legal requirements for time deadlines.
9. If the parents are not satisfied with the recommendations or services offered by the school district, they can request a due process hearing.
10. Parents have the right to be involved in the evaluation, planning and service delivery for their child.

11. If at any time the parents do not understand information obtained, services offered, or the special education process, they have a right to an explanation that they can understand.
12. It is possible for the parents to tape record a meeting if they wish to review it later.

APPENDIX B

Empowerment/Dependency Survey

Participant: #

1. What is the name of your child's handicap?
2. How many years has your child received special education services? <3 3-5 5+
3. How many contacts did you have with the school last year?

 <10 10-15 15+
4. Do you think your child is getting a good education?
5. Are you satisfied with your child's teacher?
6. Are you satisfied with your child's assessment team?
7. Do you trust the assessment team that evaluated your child?
8. Would you like the option of having nonschool personnel assess your child?
9. Are private services available for child assessment?
10. Are your desires and concerns given enough importance?
11. Are you the most important educator of your child?
12. Is it the school's responsibility to educate your child?
13. Did you participate actively in your child's educational planning last year?
15. Would you like to be more involved in your child's educational activities?
16. Would the school allow you to be more involved in educational planning and activities if you wanted that?

17. Have other parents helped you to participate more actively in educational planning?
18. Would you feel pressure from others if you chose not to receive the special education services recommended for your child?
19. Do you put great effort into educating your child?
20. Would your child receive a good education if you did not actively participate?
21. Does parental participation influence the educational performance of the child?
22. Did you play an important part in the educational planning for your child?
23. Has your involvement been encouraged by school personnel?
24. Are you comfortable speaking up in educational planning meetings?
25. Do you get frustrated when you attempt to participate in meetings?
26. Could you change your child's educational plan if you wanted to?
27. Are you angry that the school was unsuccessful in improving the condition of your child's handicapping condition?
28. Are you employed outside the home?
29. Are you living with the other birth parent of your child?

30. Did you know that your participation in educational planning is required by law?
31. Has your participation in educational planning increased or decreased because you know it is required?
32. Do you receive SSI benefits for your handicapped child?
33. What is your racial background?