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AUTHOR Turco, Angela
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ABSTRACT

An intervention project sought to lower the grade retention rates of kindergarten, first-, and second-grade students in one New Jersey school district. During three school years, 1987-1990, the retention rate was 7 percent of the total population of these grades. An exploration of causes identified several possible factors, including: (1) lack of preschool experience; (2) developmental immaturity; (3) increased academic expectations; (4) absence of full- or extended-day kindergarten; (5) developmentally inappropriate teaching techniques; (6) classroom management; and (7) organizational factors. Social and environmental variables cited were: (1) behavioral problems; (2) lack of effort and motivation; (3) family transience; (4) low socio-economic background; (5) poor attendance; (6) limited experiential background; and (7) various learning disorders. Following a review of current applicable research and classroom monitoring that assessed student achievement, instructional procedures, classroom management, and teacher effectiveness, four terminal objectives were developed to reduce the retention rate from 7 percent to 3 percent or less. Staff development, the work of the intervention committees, and the implementation of whole-language, cooperative learning, developmentally appropriate instructional practices, and the Writing to Read program all served to accomplish the objectives of the project. At the end of the 1992 school year, the retention rate was 1 percent of the kindergarten, first-, and second-grade population. (Contains 95 references.) (TJQ)

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Reducing the Retention Rate Among Kindergarten, First, and Second Grade Students

by

Angela Turco
Principal
Norma Elementary School
Olivet Elementary School
Pittsgrove Township
Salem County, New Jersey

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for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Abstract

Reducing the Retention Rate Among Kindergarten, First and Second Grade Students

Concern of this project centered on lowering the retention rate of kindergarten, first, and second grade students in the Grove Township School District. During the school years 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1989-1990, a retention rate of approximately 7% of the total population in those grades resulted in an exploration of causes. Identified factors related to the lack of pre-school experience, developmental immaturity, increased academic expectations, absence of a full or extended day kindergarten, developmentally inappropriate teaching techniques, classroom management and organizational factors. Social and environmental variables contributing to possible causes were attributed to behavioral problems, lack of effort and motivation, family transience, low socio-economic background, poor attendance, limited experiential background, and various learning disorders.

Solution strategies based on an intensive review of current applicable research included extending the kindergarten day; implementing a Chapter I pre-school; articulating basic skills and classroom instruction; beginning the Writing to Read program at the kindergarten level; initiating staff training and development in whole language, learning styles, new teaching strategies and classroom management techniques. Monitoring procedures assessed student achievement, instructional procedures, classroom management, and teacher effectiveness. Four terminal objectives were developed to reduce the retention rate from 7% of the population in kindergarten, first, and second grade to 3% or less. Staff development and the implementation of whole lanugage, cooperative learning, developmentally appropriate instructional practices, the Writing to Read program and the work of the intervention committees accomplished the objectives of this project. At the end of the 1992 school year, the retention rate was 1% of the kindergarten, first, and second grade population.

Major Applied Research Project (MARP)

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Chapter 1

Problem Statement and Community Background

General Statement of the Problem

The retention rate of children in kindergarten, first, and second grade during the school years 1987-1988, 1988-1989, 1989-1990, has been approximately 7% of the total population in those grades.

Description of the Immediate Problem Context

Prior to the 1989-1990 school year, Pittsgrove Township School District was composed of two elementary schools and one high school. Norma School housed kindergarten and first grade, Olivet School housed second through sixth, and the Arthur P. Schalick High School contained grades seven through twelve.

The District was re-organized for the 1989-1990 school year. Pre-kindergarten special needs, developmental kindergarten, and transitional first are located at Norma School. Grades one through four at Olivet and fifth and sixth grades moved into the new Pittsgrove Township Middle School, and grades seven through twelve remained at the Arthur P. Schalick High School.

Central Administrative positions include the Superintendent, Business Administrator/Board Secretary, and Director of Instruction. Prior to the 1992-1993 school year, there were four building principals. I became the principal of Norma School in 1989, and remained vice principal of Olivet School, a position I held since 1984. The remaining two vice principals were

positioned at the Schalick High School. I received the principalship of Olivet School in April 1992, and remain principal of Norma School. The school district now has three building principals and two vice principals, one at Schalick High School and one at the Pittsgrove Township Middle School.

The Child Study Team is housed in a rented facility across the street from Schalick High School. It consists of one school psychologist, one guidance counselor, one full time learning disability specialist, one part time learning disability specialist, and one social worker.

Educational Programs

Norma School

Norma School serves approximately 150 pre-school special needs, developmental kindergarten, kindergarten, and transitional first grade students. The professional staff is composed of one part time principal, eight classroom teachers, one speech therapist, and a part-time nurse.

There are two 2 1/2 hour pre-school special needs classes. Each has nine children who are perceptually and/or auditorily handicapped. The classroom teacher holds an Early Childhood Special Education degree and is assisted by two full time aides. There are five regular kindergarten classes that, prior to the 1992-1993 school year, were three hours and five minutes long. These classes have been extended to four hours and 25 minutes for the 1992-1993 school year. Teachers have permanent K-8 teaching certificates.

When this project began, the kindergarten curriculum was a formal academic program which emphasized reading readiness and mathematics. The Living Alphabet Curriculum was integrated with the Scott Foresman Reading program and children were grouped homogeneously for instruction within each classroom. Instruction is presently focused on developmentally appropriate activities and whole language instruction.

In addition to the regular kindergarten program, there are two 2 1/2 hour developmental kindergarten sessions for five year old children who are developmentally unready for kindergarten. There is also a transitional first grade class for children who are not academically prepared for the first grade program. This is a full day class, which is limited to 15 children. Children who participate in the developmental program are not eligible for the transitional class.

Olivet School

Olivet School serves approximately 550 students in grades one through four. Prior to the 1992-1993 school year, the professional staff consisted of one full-time principal, one part-time vice principal, 22 classroom teachers, five basic skills teachers, four special education teachers, one speech therapist, one teacher for the gifted and talented, and one nurse. In addition, there are five specialists who provide art, music, physical education, computer education, and library skills to children on a weekly basis. I became the principal of Olivet School for the 1992-1993 school year.

The curriculum at Olivet School covers a range of subjects. Students in first and second grade were previously taught in self-contained classrooms and grouped homogeneously for reading. Students in third and fourth grades changed classes for reading and math. Reading and math groups were previously formed on homogeneous principles. The practice of tracking students in these subjects has been eliminated.

Pittsgrove Township Middle School

The Middle School serves approximately 250 students in grades five and six. Students in each grade are divided into two teams each with four classroom teachers. They are grouped within their team for all major subjects.

Guidance plays a major part in the program, as does physical education and health related topics and issues. There are two special education teachers, two basic skill teachers, one nurse, one full time principal, and one vice principal. Specialists include one art teacher, one music teacher, two physical education teachers, one librarian, and one teacher for the gifted and talented program.

Arthur P. Schalick High School

Schalick High School is a comprehensive high school serving approximately 920 junior and senior high school students. Students select courses and electives from a variety of college preparatory, business, vocational, and artistic areas. Students who want a more concentrated vocational experience may attend the shared time Salem County Vocational School during their junior and senior years.

The students that make up the Schalick High School population are essentially township residents. Elmer, New Jersey, an elementary school district, sends approximately 20 seventh graders on a tuition basis, to Schalick High School each year.

The professional staff of Schalick High School is divided into eight departments. Four teachers comprise the Applied Arts Department. There are 12 English teachers, 9 math teachers, 7 health/physical education teachers, 7 science teachers, 7 social studies teachers, 2 foreign language teachers, and 16 special service teachers which include music, special education, and guidance. The administrative staff consists of one principal and one vice principal.

Special Education Program

Special Education services in the district schools include a pre-school special needs class at Norma School which has an enrollment of 18 children. A resource room program is also in operation in each school. During the 1990-1991 school year, Norma had 6 resource room children, Olivet had 20, the Middle School had 7, and the High School had 23. Ninety-eight children throughout the district receive speech correction services; 32 children were enrolled in perceptually impaired classes; 46 children were enrolled in the district's classes for emotionally disturbed. Approximately 29 children needing special education services the district cannot supply are sent to special schools having the appropriate facilities.

Description of the Surrounding Community

Geographical Setting

Pittsgrove Township is located in the eastern section of Salem County, approximately 30 miles southeast of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and 30 miles west of Atlantic City, New Jersey. The county is bound on the west by the Delaware River. The Maurice River forms the eastern boundary, while Route 40 forms part of the northern border.

Land Use

Pittsgrove Township, the largest municipality in Salem County, is rapidly changing from a rural farming community to a residential area. The township occupies a total land area of 46.3 square miles, including forests, cultivated farmlands, residential properties, and private and state owned lakes. Of the total acreage, only 3,093 acres, or 10.4%, is developed as residential, commercial, industrial, and transportation property. Undeveloped areas occupy 26,526 acres, or 89.6%, of the township and consist of farm, vacant land, woodland, open spaces, and water.

Population and Residental Growth

The latest official report of population released by the New Jersey Department of Labor estimates that as of July 1, 1985, Pittsgrove Township had a population of 7,718 persons. The township showed a gain of 764 persons, an increase of 11.0% over its 1980 population of 6,954.

Pittsgrove Township has shown marked increases in the number

of housing units over the last decade. The township generally continues to remain a single family community with single family houses numbering 1,906, or 96%, of the entire housing stock.

Ethno Cultural Population

The 1990 U.S. Census, cited in the Pittsgrove Township Master Plan, showed the total population to be 87.55% White, 10.43% Black, and the remaining 2.02% Hispanic, Asian, and Indian.

Economic Considerations

Prior to 1970, the population of the township was primarily farm oriented. Less than 20% were blue collar workers who commuted daily to nearby factories, warehouses, and truck depots of Vineland, New Jersey, and Wilmington, Delaware. A very small percentage were businessmen.

The 1990 census has seen these figures change drastically. Farm owners and their workers composed only about 50% of the total population. Blue collar workers increased to 30%, and white collar workers comprise 20%.

Chapter 2

Problem Definition and Evidence

Problem Background

Educators, parents, and community members in Pittsgrove Township are concerned about the increasing number of students who fail to master grade level requirements in reading, language, and mathematics during their primary years. Of the many controversies surrounding the quality of American education, the most significant, according to Johnson (1984), is that of social promotion versus retention for students who fail to meet grade level requirements set by the school district. For several decades, many educators have resisted widespread use of grade level retention because of the possible damage to student self concept. Recently, several prestigious reports from the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) and the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth (1983) have advocated abolishing social promotion in favor of promotion policies based on academic progress. The Pittsgrove Township Promotion and Retention Policy is based on academic achievement. A child in the elementary grades must have a failing grade in reading, language, or mathematics to be considered for retention. A failing grade in two of the subject areas requires mandatory retention and remediation.

Evidence of Problem Discrepency

The rates at which children have been retained over previous

years has fluctuated with the prevailing philosophies concerning the practice of grade retention. Although the national trend toward lowering retention rates seen in the period between 1950 and 1976, was consistent with the social promotion philosophy at that time, according to Niklason (1984), grade-level retention has now become a common practice in the United States.

Arguments for and against retention have also been rekindled during the last 20 years as the number of student retentions has increased. A review of the research conducted by Jackson (1975), Baener (1980), Rose, Medway, Cantrell, and Marcus (1983), and Holmes and Matthews (1984) revealed that grade level retention does not bring sufficient long term gains in achievement to justify the practice. When compared to equally low achievers, Smith and Shepard (1987) maintained that children retained experience less growth than those not retained. Furthermore, Charlesworth (1989) stated that the negative effects of retention on achievement were even greater than the negative effects on emotional and social adjustment.

Student Retentions at Norma and Olivet Schools

During the 1987-1988 school year, 27 of 380 children (7%) were retained in kindergarten, first, and second grades. Of the 27 children, four were retained in kindergarten for not successfully completing the required reading readiness material. Five children were retained in first grade; three failed reading and language, and two failed reading and math. Eighteen children were retained in second grade; 15 failed reading and language,

two failed reading and math, and one child failed reading, language, and math.

During the 1988-1989 school year, 26 of 395 children (7%) were retained. Three children were retained in kindergarten for not successfully completing the reading readiness material. Six children were retained in first grade; four failed reading, and two failed reading and math. Seventeen children failed second grade; 14 failed reading and language, and two failed reading and math. One parent requested that her son be retained.

At the end of the 1989-1990 school year, 37 of 358 children (10%) were retained. Four children were retained in kindergarten for not successfully completing the reading readiness material. Eleven children were placed in a transitional first grade class which was implemented for the 1990-1991 school year. Nine children were retained in first grade; seven failed reading and language and two failed reading and math. Twelve children failed second grade; eight failed reading and language, three failed reading and math, and one failed reading, language, and math.

At the end of the 1990-1991 school year, 20 of 320 children (6%) were retained. Although there were no retentions in kindergarten, 11 children were placed in the transitional first grade for the 1991-1992 school year. The four children who failed first grade failed reading and language. Six children failed second grade; five failed reading and language and one failed reading, language, and math. (see Table 1).

Table 1

Retention Percentage by Class

Year	Kindergarten Enroll	Kindergarten Ret	First Enroll	First Ret	Second Enroll	Second Ret	Total Enroll	Total Ret	%
1887-1988	117	8	125	4	138	15	380	27	7%
1988-1989	129	9	130	3	136	14	395	26	7%
1989-1990	109	17	115	12	134	8	358	37	10%
1990-1991	102	0	105	4	113	6	320	20	6%
1991-1992	108	0	119	4	109	0	336	4	1%

Table 2

Number of Children in Chapter I Remedial Programs Scoring below the New Jersey State standard in Reading, Language, and Math.

Year	Kindergarten	First Grade	Second Grade	Student Population	%
1987-1988	34	33	28	380	24%
1988-1989	22	32	36	395	22%
1989-1990	26	33	36	358	26%
1990-1991	37	32	41	320	34%
1991-1992	35	33	15	336	24%

Remedial Assistance at Norma and Olivet Schools

Ninety-five children, or 25% of the total population in kindergarten, first, and second grades, received Chapter I remedial assistance in reading, language, and/or math during the 1987-1988 school year. During the 1988-1989 school year, 90 children (22%) received remedial instruction, and during the 1989-1990 school year, 95 children (26%) received remedial assistance. During the 1990-1991 school year, 110 children (34%) received Chapter I instruction in one or more of the basic skill areas. (see Table 2).

The resource room program provides individualized instruction in basic skill subjects for children under Child Study Team jurisdiction. During the 1990-1991 school year, Norma School had 6 resource room students, while Olivet had 20. The resource room program has operated at maximum capacity during the last three years.

Possible Causes of the Problem

Lack of Pre-school Experience

Enrollment in pre-school programs has more than doubled since the seventies. In 1990, more than 36% of three and four year olds went to school for a variety of reasons. In the past, there was little evidence that pre-school experience made a difference in academic achievement. However, recent research suggested different results for economically disadvantaged children. Lazar and Darlington (1982) found that 44% of children without pre-school experience either repeated a grade or spent time in

special education classes. Consequently, pre-school intervention may be particularly effective for the most economically disadvantaged.

More than 20 states have passed legislation e ther encouraging or mandating school districts to implement early childhood programs. In the next few years, the school's role is expected to become even more critical as dramatic changes in family life impact education. Cheever and Ryder (1986) offered the following demographics: (a) by 1990, almost half of the labor force will be women: (b) 60% of mothers with children aged three to five are currently working: (c) in 1983, almost one in four American children was poor: (d) 45% of children born in the 1990s will live in single parent households: and (e) 33% of all marriages are now remarriages and one child in four is growing up in a blended family. Consequently, the need for family support systems with high quality early pre-school programs exists, especially if poor and disadvantaged children are to achieve success in school. Schweinhart and Weikart (1985) maintained that early childhood education for the disadvantaged youth could help break the cycle of poverty. The economic benefit to society would seem to more than justify the cost of providing pre-school programs for at-risk children.

Developmental Age Factor

As public school kindergartens become more academic, there is increased concern regarding how young children will adjust to the academic pressures. Many factors have a bearing on whether or

not a child is ready for school. Historically, chronological age has been the most widely used criterion in determining entry. Maturity, which has generally been ignored previously is now receiving attention. The possibility that much of the failure in our schools is the result of a child's lack of readiness for school has been addressed by Uphoff and Gilmore (1986). They maintain that children who are developmentally unprepared to cope with increasing academic pressures face disadvantages that may become lifelong. Their research on academic success reveals that chronologically older children in a grade tend to receive more above average grades from teachers and score higher on standardized achievement tests. Younger children are more likely to fail and be referred for learning disabilities testing then are older children.

Elkind (1986) maintains that the trend in early childhood programs toward increased emphasis on formal instruction in academic skills is based on misconceptions about how young children learn. Children learn most effectively through the active exploration and manipulation of concrete materials. Such is not characteristic of today's early childhood education and kindergarten programs. A position statement by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1986) included a plea for high quality developmentally appropriate programs to be made available for all four and five year old children.

High Academic Standards

Many school systems across the United States have yielded to

parental and taxpayer pressure to set high academic standards in early primary grades. Toch (1984) questions how schools will cope with those students who fail to meet the stricter requirements. He states that if schools cannot insure that the excellence movement is within the reach of every student, school reform may do nothing more than widen the gap between the haves and the have nots. Many citizens would be less able to manage in an increasingly complicated world. Studies conducted by Hubbell (1980), cited in Holmes and Lehr (1982), maintain that the increasing retention rates in the early primary grades is due to the increased emphasis on competency based education and on school policies which base promotion solely on academic progress. The notion of replacing social promotion with promotion based on academic progress has increased during the last 20 years. It provides a way to show the accountability-minded public that policy makers are setting higher standards, and that many educators view the practice as pedagogically sensible.

The Lack of a Full-Day Kindergarten

The trend to lengthen the time children spend in kindergarten has been developing and accelerating in recent years. While the majority of today's five year olds still participate in a half day kindergarten, a growing number are being served in an extended, or full-day program. A study conducted by the Educational Research Service Inc. (1986) indicates that nationwide, nearly 35% of kindergarten pupils are in a full-day program. According to the study, in New Jersey, full-day

programs had enrolled 7,427 children; by 1988-1989, the number of children in full-day programs had more than doubled.

Full-Day versus Half-Day Kindergarten Controversy

Kindergarten teachers who met with the New Jersey School Boards Association in 1990, testified that the minimum two and one-half hour daily kindergarten schedule is grossly inadequate. To accommodate an increasingly academic-oriented kindergarten program, to allow for play, socialization, and enrichment activities, and to provide for individual instruction and permit adequate time for assessment of children's needs, additional time is needed. They further maintained that mandated special programs such as English as a Second Language (ESL) and Basic Skills Programs pull students from the already too-short classroom program. According to teachers, the lack of sufficient time to provide individualized attention to students with a wide range of readiness skills has resulted in increased numbers of in-grade retentions in the primary grades.

Most of the major studies on the subject of full-day versus half-day kindergarten have reported positive effects on social and cognitive development of children in full-day or extended day kindergarten programs, particularly for disadvantaged children. Hills (1985) summarizes the major findings of published reports comparing full-day programs with half-day programs. She reports finding predominantly positive effects on children's intellectual and social-personal development. From full-day programs, Hills states that children demonstrate higher

achievement, enhanced social-personal abilities, and heightened interest in school. Also, parents endorsed the longer day, and teacher reaction was positive. Included among the short-term effects cited were: (a) all day kindergarten programs have positive effects on readiness for formal academic learning; (b) the additional time for learning strengthened skill acquisition and concept development; (c) the beneficial effects apparently occur for pupils who enter kindergarten from all backgrounds, although they may be greater for pupils who enter kindergarten with lower levels of sensory-motor skills, language ability, and social experience.

Most of the long-term effects of full-day programs have been extracted from studies made at the first grade level, primarily by means of standardized test results. Neiman and Gastwirth (1981) and Humphrey (1983) provide evidence from longitudinal studies that suggest long-term benefits such as sustained higher achievement in reading and mathematics, fewer in-grade retentions, and a reduced number of special education placements. Conclusions may be drawn from the findings of such studies that benefits accrue to the children who have longer programs. Adcock, Hess, and Mitchell (1980) claim that longer programs may also help low-achieving children overcome some of their problems. Differences between such children and more advantaged children appear to lessen.

Several organizations in New Jersey have examined the issue of full-day versus half-day kindergarten programs. Among those

who are in support of full-day programs are New Jersey Association of Kindergarten Educators, New Jersey Education Association, New Jersey Principal's and Supervisor's Association, and New Jersey Child Care Advisory Council.

Hill (1985) states opponents of the full-day kindergarten program suggest the following disadvantages: (a) full-day programs may be too long for some children to benefit from; (b) full-day programs require additional expenses for teachers, equipment, and space; (c) the curriculum would become more academically oriented exposing young children to more stress and the possibility of failure; and (d) young children need to spend more time at home in meaningful interactions with family members.

Lack of Developmentally Appropriate Teaching Practices in the Primary Grades.

The examination of our nation's educational system has included concerns about the quality of education provided in elementary schools. Concerns have been raised because many elementary schools have narrowed their curriculum in response to the "back to basics" movement of the 70's and have adopted instructional approaches that are incompatible with current knowledge about how young children learn and what they should learn. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1986), rote learning of academic skills often emphasized in primary grades is a developmentally inappropriate practice. Although children are being exposed to academic skills, they are not learning to apply those skills in context and are, therefore, not developing more complex thinking skills.

The Association maintaines that one index of quality for primary education is the extent to which the curriculum and instructional methods are integrated and developmentally appropriate for children. Programs must provide a safe and nurturing environment that promote the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children while responding to the needs of families. Developmentally appropriate practices are, therefore, those which are founded on a knowledge of child development and incorporate concepts of both age and individual appropriateness in their application.

To provide a developmentally appropriate early childhood education, one must know the development occuring at this period in life and must understand how young children learn. Lawton (1982) emphasized the most important premise of human development, namely, that all aspects of development, physical, social-emotional, and cognitive, are integrated. Development in one dimension influences and is influenced by development in another. This premise is violated when schools place greater emphasis on the cognitive domain while minimizing other aspects of children's development. Because development cannot be separated into parts, failure to attend to all aspects of an individual child's development in school is often the root cause of a child's failure.

Instructional strategies at both the Norma and Olivet Schools did not comply with developmentally appropriate principles. The curriculum was divided into separate subjects, and time was

allocated for each. Primary emphasis was given to reading and, secondarily, to math. Social studies, science, and health were included in the curriculum but not emphasized. Art, music, physical education, library, and computer skills are taught once a week by teachers who specialize in those areas. Instructional strategies included teacher-directed reading groups that took up most of the morning, teaching to the whole class, and whole class discussion. Paper and pencil practice exercises and worksheets were completed by children who worked individually at their desks and there was little, if any, collaboration among the children as they worked.

The primary grades hold the potential for starting children on a course of lifelong learning. According to Shepard and Smith (1986) whether schools achieve this potential is largely dependent on the degree to which teachers practice developmentally appropriate principles.

Teaching Strategies

The quality of teaching and learning in the elementary school is believed to be the key to achievement and desire for life-long learning. Bloom (1986) maintains if student learning proceeds well during the primary years, students will develop a positive view of their ability to learn which will, in turn, increase their commitment to future learning. The opposite holds true for children who learn poorly. Efforts to improve achievement and reduce failure have, therefore, been focused on instructional strategies, grouping practices, the content and articulation

of the curriculum, and restructuring schools, in general.

During the past ten years, research on learning styles has yielded interesting findings about the effects of environmental, emotional, sociological, physiological, and cognitive preferences on student achievement. The term "learning styles" used by educators is an umbrella concept and is used to identify individual learning differences. It has become a complex field of study which supports several models, each with different perspectives on how the human mind operates and learns. Although the validity of related research results is being questioned and attacked, Dunn, Beaudry, and Klavas (1989) maintain that student achievement will increase when teaching methods are matched to learning styles. Dunn (1990) states that student failure can be reduced when children are taught with methods and approaches that are responsive to their learning style strength. According to Marshall (1990), director of the Center for Slower Learners, research on at-risk students reveals that their learning strengths are rarely accommodated in traditionally instructed classrooms. As a result, many children who have been classified "learning disabled" achieved well when taught to their learning style strength. The possibility of identifying and accommodating different learning styles as a basis for providing more effective instruction appears to have a place in meeting the needs of a diverse student population and reducing the failure rate. The many controversies and difficulties which surround learning style strategies need to be examined before any one

approach or combination of approaches can be recommended for implementation.

Teaching Effectiveness

Assessing the quality of teacher effectiveness and relating it to student achievement is not new in public education. The primary rationale for teacher evaluation is to provide the basis to improve instruction and increase learning. Soar, Medley, and Coker (1983) maintain that effective supervision and evaluation of teachers is one of the most important tasks in facilitating effective teaching strategies and assisting in developing more effective learning opportunities.

There are many problems with the evaluation instrument and procedures used in the Pittsgrove district. Administrators are required to write brief descriptions of lessons being observed followed by comments and recommendations regarding the quality of a teacher's performance. Comments and recommendations are based on the administrator's own interpretation of what constitutes effective teaching. Since criteria for effective teaching often varies with the evaluator, evaluations are totally subjective, not necessarily valid, and often partial or prejudice. According to the literature, the effectiveness of evaluation practices has been researched extensively. The findings of Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin, and Bernstein (1984), Harris (1986), and Stiggins and Duke (1988) indicate that many teachers feel evaluation activities are essentially ritualistic, meaningless, and a waste of time. Their research

also supports the contention that the process rarely results in greater teacher accountability, improved educational practices, or incr ased student achievement. Nevertheless, the evaluation process and instrument used in Pittsgrove can provide teachers and administrators with some valid and reliable feedback regarding instructional procedures and teacher effectiveness. If this information is used to assess performance and improve instruction in an environment characterized by support, respect, and trust, the procedure can help to improve instruction and student learning.

Classroom Organization

Grouping Arrangements

Achievement effects of various forms of grouping arrangements at both the elementary and secondary levels have been studied for many years. According to Billett (1932) interest in research on grouping in the 1920's was stimulated, in part, by the large number of immigrants and poor children the schools were serving. For the sake of instructional efficiency, schools needed to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of the diverse student body. Since that time, the principal rationale for various forms of grouping, designed to deal with students who differ in knowledge, skills, developmental stages, and learning rates, has remained the same.

According to Slavin (1988), the principal types of grouping arrangements fall into two major categories: between-class and with-in class. Between-class grouping is school level

arrangements by which children are assigned to classes. Within class grouping is the practice of assigning students to homogeneous subgroups for instruction within the class. Each subgroup receives instruction at its own level and progresses at its own rate. Within-class ability grouping has been virtually universal in elementary reading instruction and is common in elementary mathematics. Within-class ability grouping, however, introduces the problem of managing multiple groups. When the teacher is instructing one group, the remaining students work independently on seatwork activities which may be of questionable value. Supervising multiple groups and the transitions between them are, according to Anderson (1979), and Slavin (1987) major classroom management problems.

Research on within-class ability grouping has been limited to the study of mathematics grouping. Evidence supports the effectiveness of this grouping arrangement for math instruction only. The within-class ability grouping arrangement, however, has been used to teach reading at both the Norma and Olivet Schools. According to Cunninghan, Hall, and Defee (1991), this arrangement is not supported by research. Morgan (1989) maintained that a growing body of research indicates that within-class ability grouping does not increase student reading achievement and may, in fact, have detrimental effects on the self-concept and potential achievement of students in lower groups. Allington (1983) has demonstrated that placement in the bottom reading group can hinder reading development, since

instruction is often less beneficial than that provided to other groups.

The most controversial form of grouping is between-class grouping, which assigns students to groups according to ability or performance. Arguments about the desirability of between-class ability groups have existed from the 1920's to the present. Strather (1985) and Nevi (1987) maintain that ability groups allow high achievers to move rapidly and give low achievers attainable goals and extra help. Edler (1982) and Wilkins, Cherry, and Calculator (1982) found that ability grouping was unfair to low achievers, citing the problem of poor peer models, low teacher expectations, and slow instructional pace.

A commonly used ability grouping arrangement has students remain in heterogeneous classes most of the day but regroup for selected subjects. Regrouping for selective subjects has three important advantages over ability grouped class assignment. First, children remain in a heterogeneous setting most of the day which reduces the labeling effect of all day grouping. Second, students are grouped solely on the basis of their achievement in the particular subject, so a meaningful reduction in heterogeneity in the skill being taught is possible. Third, elementary re-grouping plans tend to be more flexible in operation than ability grouped class assignment because changing students between reading or mathematics classes is less disruptive than changing basic class assignments. According to Slavin (1987), limited research on regrouping plans suggests that regrouping can be

instructionally effective if the instructional level and pace are adopted to student performance level, and if regrouping is arranged for only one or two subjects allowing students to stay in heterogeneous placements most of the day.

Cooperative Learning

The term "cooperative learning" refers to instructional methods in which children work in small, heterogeneous learning groups toward some group goal. This arrangement differs from within-class ability grouping in that the learning groups are small, heterogeneous, and children are expected to engage in task-focused interaction, such as studying together or completing a group assignment. There are eight major types of cooperative learning methods and strategies. Each differs in its degree of effectiveness with different grade levels and different subject matter. Selecting the appropriate method is a major factor in determining the impact of cooperative learning on student achievement. All methods have the common purpose of promoting student cooperation, rather than competition, in the learning process. According to Slavin (1983), the idea behind cooperative learning is that if students are rewarded on the basis of group or team performance, they will be motivated to help and encourage each other to achieve. Studies of cooperative learning methods have consistently found that they increase student achievement in a variety of subject areas and grade levels. Johnson and Johnson (1978) strong supporters of the use of cooperative learning, identify conditions where competitive and individualistic

incentive structures can be productively used to supplement cooperative learning. Generally, competitive and individualistic incentive structures can be effectively used to increase achievement on tasks that are relatively simple and require little help from the teacher or other students. Examples of such tasks are spelling, vocabulary, and certain math activities.

Cooperative learning methods should not be used to teach every subject. The appropriate and effective implementation of cooperative learning requires a thorough understanding of the concept, specific methods, and roles of teachers, parents, students, and administrators.

Assessment Practices

Student evaluation is essential to academic growth. For approximately 20 years, what has typically been accepted as the measure of achievement has been assessment practices build on standardized, commercially published, and norm-referenced multiple choice tests. Although such tests remain firmly established, many educators, informed politicians, and influential decisions makers are beginning to recognize the inadequencies of these tests. According to Darling-Hammond (1991), evidence suggests that reliance on test scores as a measure of achievement has negative consequences for quality instruction and for allocating school opportunities. The negative consequences stem partly from the nature of the tests and partly from the way test scores have been used to make educational decisions. The construction of these tests ignores the kind of knowledge and type

of performance we expect from students. Rather than engage their capacities to structure tasks, generate ideas, and solve problems, the testing situation places students in a passive reactive role. Sternberg (1985) and Resnick (1987) concur that research on human learning and performance suggests that many tests now being used fail to measure students' higher-order cognitive abilities or to support their capacities to perform real-world tasks. Nevertheless, many states and school districts have enacted policies requiring that test scores be used as criteria for decision making regarding school readiness, promotion, retention, classification, tracking, and graduation. Shepard and Smith (1986) maintain that policies for automatically retaining students based on test scores have actually produced lower achievement, lower self-esteem, and higher dropout rates. Consequently, as test scores have come to play an increasingly important role in educational decisions, their flaws become even more damaging.

In both the Norma and Olivet Schools, test scores play a less powerful role. Criteria for grading are composed of many modes of assessment that measure what children know and what they can do. Classwork, homework, and tests scores are included in the criteria.

Social and Environmental Variables

Other reasons for retention often cited in the literature have been attributed to disruptive behavior, lack of effort and motivation, poor attendance, poor experiential background,

emotional problems, family transience, and low socio-economic status. Schools have little, if any influence over many of these factors. Rose et al. (1983) find higher incidents of retention among Blacks, Spanish speaking children, children from homes that were below poverty level, and children whose parent(s) had less than 12 years of education. In the case of Peter Doe vs the San Francisco Unified School District, cited in Rose et al. (1983), the court noted that achievement of literacy is influenced by many factors outside the formal teaching experience. The retention issue is obviously a very complex one. Current nonpromotion statistics, new basic skills legislation and competency testing, research data, and school grade placement practices all contribute to the complexity of the issues which surround the retention-promotion controversey. Compounding the issue, the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (1987) have identified a number of "unacceptable" practices that have resulted from the recent trend to increase academic expectations at kindergarten and primary levels. Among practices under attack are the use of developmental and transitional classes to provide for children deemed unready for kindergarten or the next grade and the increased used of retention, since it essentially discriminates against lower-class and minority children for circumstances they cannot control.

Chapter 3

Influences in the Problem Context Bearing on Solutions and Outcomes

Beneficial Influences in the Immediate Problem Setting

Developmental Kindergarten

In September of 1989, the writer implemented a developmental kindergarten to address the needs of children who are developmentally younger than their chronological age. The program was designed to allow young five year old children to achieve success while performing tasks at their own developmental level in an unstressful learning environment. Although some young children may be superior in cognitive abilities, Elkind (1988) maintains they need time for their physical, social, and general adaptive abilities to mature if they are to make the most of their superior cognitive abilities in later years. Although the value of developmental kindergartens is being questioned, I believe benefit lies in integrating learning principles with the laws of growth and development.

Transitional First-Grade

In September 1990, the writer implemented a transitional first grade class to address the needs of children who are not academically ready for a first grade curriculum. The program was designed to improve deficiencies in reading and math, develop oral and written language skills, and increase each child's ability to comprehend and follow directions.

According to Shepard and Smith (1986) and Meisels (1989), extra year programs have the same affect as retention. They maintain that adding an extra year to a child's schooling increases the possibility that the child will drop out of school in later years. Uphoff (1990) claimed, however, that there is no conclusive evidence connecting extra year programs such as developmental kindergartens and transitional grades, with dropping out of school. Uphoff, who is recognized by the National Association for the Education of Young Children as one of seven experts on school readiness, states that opponents of extra-year programs have shown a pronounced tendency to confuse them with academic retention. They assert that developmental and transitional pupils are as likely to drop out of school as are those who have failed. Uphoff states opposition to such programs are based on the misrepresentation of research data, testing dissimilar groups of retained children and consolidating the results, and reporting statements of opinion as fact. He believes developmental and transitional classes help children overcome age-related problems by providing appropriate learning experiences prior to kindergarten and first grade.

Research studies, as reported by Uphoff (1990), lead to three conclusions. First, in terms of academic achievement, students in developmental and transitional classes have, in letter grades, done at least as well as, or better than, fellow students. Second, both classes have been found to produce positive and statistically significant benefits in regards to student self-

concept and emotional and social maturity. Third, studies reveal strong parental satisfaction and support for extra year programs. In recent years, an increasing number of school districts are turning to developmental kindergartens and transitional classes as a prime variable necessary for some children to achieve academically. In Pittsgrove Township, both programs are facilitating influences.

Remedial Reading Program

The Scott Foresman Focus Remedial Reading Program was purchased in 1990, for use with children receiving remedial instruction and reading six months to a year below grade level. To integrate instruction, the author coordinated classroom and remedial schedules so that student remedial reading classes immediately followed classroom reading lessons. Classroom lessons were, therefore, reinforced and supplemented on a daily basis. The improvement in scheduling was intended to articulate the classroom reading program and remedial reading instruction.

Deficient Influences in the Immediate Problem Setting

Chapter I Pre-School

Knapp, Turnbull, and Shields (1990) maintain that children from poverty experience failure disproportionally in their early years and often leave school ill-prepared for life. Quality early childhood programs can be effective in reducing school failure and related social problems. However, poor children who have much to gain from such programs have the least access to them.

Although the ultimate causes of educational failure may vary significantly from child to child, the Committee for Ecomonic Development (1987) maintains that patterns of behavior that lead to school failure and dropping out of school begin to appear during infancy and the toddler years. Without early intervention, such children will have difficulty taking advantage of learning opportunities available in elementary and secondary school. Research shows that addressing these problems has benefits for families, children themselves, and society as a whole. The research of T. Berry Brazelton, the Massachusetts child developmentalist, reported by Weiner and Koppelman (1987), claims early intervention has two major positive effects on the child. Many physical and psychological disorders may be prevented, and their effects on the quality of life of the person involved can be mitigated.

The communities of Norma and Brotmanville, located in the eastern corner of Pittsgrove Township, are among the most depressed. Most families live below the poverty level, and consequently, pre-school and child care opportunities are financially prohibitive. Eighty-five percent of children who have been retained, who receive remedial instruction, and who are presently at-risk for failing come from the communities of Norma and Brotmanville. Implementing a quality pre-school program at the Norma School may be one of the most important challenges Pittsgrove Township faces and, if implemented, could help break the cycle created by poverty.

Basic Skills Summer School

Pittsgrove Township has not offered a basic skills summer school program for elementary children. Budget constraints have hindered offering programs which, in the long run, would be more cost effective than remediation or retention.

Staff Development

Another cause of student failure may be related to the traditional grade level instructional methods used to teach heterogeneous classes of students. Student learning styles and implications therein for effective instructional strategies and technologies such as mastery learning, team teaching, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and others could help provide for individual differences in student abilities and learning. Application of instructional strategies based on the research in effective schools could help reduce learning deficiencies and retention rate. To this end, emphasis will be placed on staff development.

Parental Pressures

Parents whose children have been enrolled in pre-school with academic curricula, or who have been taught at home, often pressure school districts to provide more accelerated programs for their children. Formal reading instruction has become the norm for kindergarten classes. Children developmentally younger than classmates and children without the advantage of early reading exposure are likely to experience difficulty and possible failure in one of the primary grades. The acceleration of academic

standards in the early primary grades ignores how young children learn and how best to teach them. Consequently, failure has increased in these grades.

Internal Factors

Tracking and Grouping

Many schools use tracking to accommodate instruction to the range of student needs, interests, and abilities. The assumption is that students will learn best when the instructional content is matched to individual knowledge and abilities. Students are divided into homogeneous learning groups so that teachers can offer lessons which will maximize student motivation and learning. When this project began, grouping in both the Norma and Olivet Schools was accomplished within a heterogeneous class by forming smaller subgroups for instruction, such as the three reading groups found in most elementary schools.

Arguments against ability grouping usually emphasize the fact that children in lower groups are often stigmatized by a schoolwide and/or classwide attitude that they are not capable learners. According to Oaks (1985) and Mitchell (1989), when such negative images are shared by teachers, certain instructional consequences follow. Fewer curriculum units are covered. The pace of instruction is slower, and fewer demands are made for learning higher-order skills. Tests and homework requirements are taken less seriously. Goodlad (1983) stated that grouping widens the gap between students in the top and bottom groups. Consequently, for children in bottom groups, the

effects of grouping produces slower rates of learning, lower expectations, and cumulative losses.

Compensatory and Remedial Programs

According to the research conducted by Anderson and Pellicer (1990), the effectiveness of compensatory and remedial programs may not be worth the funding they receive. Remedial programs were generally initiated to provide quality education for economically disadvantaged and academically deficient children. Instead, they often contribute to fragmented learning experiences for children. Research conducted by the Office of Educational Research and Development (1991) maintains that the most serious problem with remedial programs is that they are poorly coordinated with regular classroom instruction, resulting in impeding the learning process. Furthermore, Jensen (1985) maintains that state remedial programs and the federally funded compensatory education programs have not resulted in any appreciable gains in scholastic achievement for children who have participated in them.

The lack of articulation between remedial and classroom instruction has been a hindering factor for many years. The changes which I have made to coordinate the programs should help facilitate instruction and provide needed continuity.

Budget Constraints

As a result of the state cutback in funding, Pittsgrove Township School District did not receive $1,250,000 in expected revenue for the 1991-1992 school year. Although all elementary

programs will still be in effect, additions and improvements to existing programs will be minimal. Continued reduction in funds would seriously hinder program and staff development.

Influences in the Broader Community

Pittsgrove Township Elementary PTA

The Norma and Olivet School PTA is a combined organization whose influence in both schools has been extremely valuable. Fund raising efforts have facilitated the purchase of additional equipment and supplies. Assembly programs, experiential activities, and family programs have increased interest, participation, and support for all school programs and functions.

Media

The local newspaper and radio stations provide excellent coverage of school activities and events. Coverage, however, has both facilitating and hindering aspects, depending of the issues reported.

Standardized Testing

In most states, the movement to create national standards for student achievement has been linked to some form of standardized testing. The use of standardized test scores for this purpose has become a controversial and hindering influence. Marzano and Costa (1988) maintain that there is a growing concensus among educators that test scores are not reliable indicators of student achievement, but rather reflect how well students have learned the factual information represented on test items. Consequently, the validity and reliability of standardized test scores are being

seriously questioned. O'Neil (1991) states many critics believe the standardized test undermines curricular goals, narrows the scope of what is being taught, and ignores the importance of problem solving and critical thinking skills. Worthen and Spandel (1991) maintain that standardized test scores were never intended to assess the diverse array of learning that occurs in classrooms but were to provide a broad assessment of student performance. Nevertheless, standardized tests are influencing what is taught in many schools throughout the United States, and this influence is becoming increasingly apparent and detrimental.

Chapter 4

Problem Conceptualization, Solution Strategies and Projecting Outcomes

Problem Statement

Retention rates declined in the 1950's, partially because of the acceptance of social promotions, but increased in the 1980's in response to demands for accountability and the minimum competency testing movement. Some research studies indicate that students who repeat a grade do no better than children of like ability who are promoted. Other researchers critize retention by suggesting that it can produce long-term damaging effects, and it discriminates against lower-class and minority children for circumstances they cannot control. Several researchers suggest that retention may benefit immature students, and that if practiced at all, should be practiced as early as possible. There are no simple answers to this controversy. One thing, however, is basic. Grade placement decisions must be made on an individual basis by educators who are familiar with research, theory, and practice as it relates to student retention. In this way, placement alternatives can be developed which will significantly contribute to the academic and emotional development of children.

Review of the Literature

A great deal of research has been conducted regarding the growing trends in the testing and retention of young children. A

number of scholars have charged that more and more schools are using the results of tests to retain children in kindergarten and early primary grades. The current practice of assessment and retention of young children has been driven by two sets of forces: (a) mandates and symbolic messages from policymakers and the public; and (b) the coping behaviors and supporting beliefs of teachers and principals. During the 1980's, beliefs regarding the declining levels of school performance stemmed largely from low standards of achievement and low educator expectations for students.

The first wave of educational reforms focused on higher standards for students, on increasing teacher accountability, and greater reliability on testing. Retention rates increased as educators conveyed the message that higher standards were being upheld. Evidence also indicates that teacher decisions on student retention reflected their beliefs that grade retention was beneficial. Since teachers have no way of comparing possible outcomes of promoting and retaining a given child, Shepard and Smith (1989) maintain that they tend to focus on gains made by children who were retained and underestimate both the personal cost to these children and to their parents. Also overlooked was the "opportunity costs" of learning that could have occurred had the children been promoted. For more than 100 years, children who have not done well in school have been retained. Retention remains a most controversial issue and practice in education today.

Saunders (1941), Hefferner (1952), and Jackson (1975) have collectively reviewed 75 years of literature regarding the promotion-retention controversey. They maintain that the presumed benefits of grade level retention on children's academic, social, and emotion growth have not been proven. Furthermore, research conducted over time did not document the negative effects on children's development. Jackson (1975) also pointed out that methodological flaws in research designs biased findings either toward demonstrating that retention was beneficial or that it was ineffective and harmful.

Historically, grade level retention has been used almost since the beginning of compulsory education. While its value remains unproven, Ames (1980) and Rose, et al. (1983) maintain that retention is a common practice in education. The national movement toward raising promotional standards is rooted in a deep concern about achievement. Educators, parents, politicians, and the general public are concerned about the widely publicized decline in standardized test scores and in the number of high school students who have failed to master basic skills. Since the decline in achievement is seen by the American public as the result of the relaxation of academic standards, the general public and many educators, parents, and politicians appear to believe that an increase in achievement can be brought about by increasing academic standards. According to Toch (1984), school districts across the United States have been pressured by politicians to set higher standards beginning with the primary

grades and to assure the American public that children will meet them. Children, however, are not the only victims in the push for higher academic standards. Hatch and Freeman (1988) claim that many early childhood educators also experience stress created by the imposition of higher academic standards which conflict with what they know to be appropriate educational expectations for young children. School systems that set higher academic standards, especially in primary grades, and make promotion contingent upon mastery of the accelerated standards, also increase the probability that retention rates will continue to climb.

The United States Census Bureau data, cited in Smith and Shepard (1987), indicate that the percentage of school-aged children enrolled in a grade below the modal grade for their age has shown an increase since the middle 1970's. The most recent data show that in 1982, 21% of males and 15% of females were one year below the modal grade, and that 5% of males and 3% of females were two years below level. The overall retention rate in the United States has been estimated to be 15% to 19%. Data from the Office of UNESCO Statistics revealed that most European countries have a retention rate of less than 1%.

The incidence of retention in the primary grades appears to vary between minority and non-minority children, from state to state, school system to school system within each state, and among schools in the same system. Gridler (1978) found a difference of over 18% in K-2 retention rates between two schools

in proximity in the same system, and with similar social and intellectual demographic profiles. Gridler attributes the differences in the retention rate to different grade retention philosophies among school personnel.

The most comprehensive of several reviews of research on retention is a meta-analysis conducted by Holmes and Matthews (1984). The ccnsistent conclusion was that children make progress during the year they repeat a grade but not as much progress as similar children who were promoted. In controlled studies of the effect of non-promotion on both achievement and personal adjustment, results indicated that children who repeated a grade were consistently worse off than comparable children who were promoted with their age-mates. The negative effect of retention on achievement was found to be greater than the negative effect on emotional adjustment and self-concept. Many researchers claim that various combinations of teachers' knowledge and beliefs about retention, beliefs about child development, the downward press of the school curriculum into kindergarten, parental pressure, and the bureaucratization of schools account for the variation in retention practices. Smith and Shepard (1987) maintain that there is little justification to continue a practice which evidence indicates is one part of the current reform package that does not work. Moreover, retention and practices associated with it are costly to taxpayers and pupils affected. They are also inherently discriminatory to boys, poor children, the relatively young, and the relatively small.

Changing Kindergartens

Kindergarten programs have changed over the years and their practices are being scrutinized due to increasing retention rates and concern regarding appropriate methodologies. In many communities, kindergarten is no longer a part-time play oriented introduction to school. It has become "real" school. Many school districts provide full day programs, and children spend significant time in academic pursuits. As kindergarten becomes more academically oriented, many children will not succeed. In an attempt to insure success, school boards have raised entrance age, given readiness tests, and provided extra year programs for those who appear "unready." According to Hatch and Freeman (1988), such practices are not always in the best interest of children. A popular belief among many parents and educators is that older children will be more successful in kindergarten and early primary grades. Consequently, many school boards require that children be five years old by September 1, in order to enter kindergarten. An increasing number of families who are able to pay for private day care are voluntarily delaying their children's entrance to school. Other parents simply keep their children at home. Studies conducted over the past 40 years confirm the fact that younger children are more likely to encounter early school difficulities that often result in grade retention. Shepard and Smith (1988), however, state that the detriment of being the youngest in a grade is slight and disappears by third grade if instruction is individualized.

Whatever cutoff date school districts select, some children will always be up to one year younger than others. Consequently, they will be at a relative disadvantage, especially if the demands of kindergarten continue to escalate to reflect the capabilities of older children.

According to Uphoff and Gilmore (1986), the issue of entrance age seems particularly significant. They maintain that younger children developmentally unprepared to cope with school pressures face disadvantages that may become life long. Although there are exceptions, studies show that children who enter school based only on chronological age tend to have lower achievement scores, attain poorer marks, have a lower mental age in relation to their peers, and are physically, socially, and emotionally less mature. When using chronological age as the only entrance criterion, as is typical, it is quite common to have a full year age variance in a kindergarten or first grade class. This variance creates many problems that do not always disappear in upper grades. Younger children, particularly males by virtue of characteristically slower early development, are at a disadvantage when it comes to sitting quietly, sharing, concentrating, working neatly, and following directions. One of the most important premises of human development is that all domains of development - physical, social, emotional, and cognitive are integrated. Development in one dimension influences and is influenced by the development in other dimensions. This premise is violated when schools place a

greater emphasis on the cognitive domain while minimizing other aspects of development. Because development cannot be separated into parts, failure to attend to all aspects of a child's development is often at the root of a child's failure in school. According to Ames (1980), participation in a developmental kindergarten program advocated by proponents of Gesell and other developmentalists would appear to be an appropriate preventative.

In addition to age, many districts consider a child's test score on readiness tests in determining who needs extra time or a special program. This is occuring despite a consensus among early childhood educators and testing experts that test scores should not be used in this way. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1988), cited in Peck, McCaig, and Sapp (1988), readiness tests are likely to result in the misplacement of children. The error rate of such tests ranges from 33% to 50%. Meisels (1989) stated that a number of widely used readiness tests assess children's mastery of a specific set of skills. He maintaines that to assume such tests give a clear picture of a child's future performance is highly questionable. Yet many districts are using these tests to make decisions on placement and promotion.

Pre-School Programs

In the early 1960's, many leading educators and social scientists expressed hope that pre-school education programs for poor children would help break the cycle of poverty. They assumed that a chain of cause and effect linked family poverty to

the academic failure of children and to their subsequent poverty as adults. According to Woodruff (1980), pre-school programs such as Head Start, the Perry Preschool Project, Mother-Child Home Program, and others have been associated with both long and short term positive effects on low-income children. Results of studies indicate that children who participated showed improved intellectual performance during their early childhood, better scholastic placement and improved scholastic achievement during the elementary school years, lower rate of delinquency during adolescence, and higher rates of both graduation from high school and employment at age 19. According to Schweinhart and Weikart (1985), there are many good reasons for state and local school administrators to use Chapter I funds for pre-school programs for children at-risk of failure. Good pre-school programs can have a beneficial effect on the lives of children reared in poverty.

Recently, the nation's governors and President Bush established six National Education Goals to guide the improvement of our schools over the next decade. The President's first goal, by the year 2000 every child in America should start school "ready to learn," is a bold, hugely optimistic proposition. According to Hodgkinson (1991), far too many of the nation's children come to school without a good beginning. They are shockingly restricted in their potential for learning even before their first formal lesson, destined for school failure because of poverty, neglect, sickness, handicapping conditions, and the lack

of adult protection and nurturance. In another assessment, after evaluating the school readiness of children in the southern region of the United States, the Southern Regional Education Board (1988) concluded that not all children are ready to begin first grade, and too many may never catch up. Unless additional steps are taken, possibly one-third of the approximately one million children projected to be entering the first-grade will not be ready to do so in the year 2000.

In the summer of 1991, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching surveyed more than 7,000 kindergarten teachers to learn about the readiness of children. Teachers were asked how well prepared their children were for formal education. Questions focused on physical well-being, social confidence, emotional maturity, language richness, general knowledge, and moral awareness. According to the teachers, 35% of the nation's children are not ready for school. When asked how the readiness of last year's students compared to those enrolled five years ago, 42% of the teachers said the situation was worse. Proficiency in language was cited as the most deficient area. Teachers also stated that too many children come to school hungry. Many are tired or in need of love and attention. More and more children are believed to have deep emotional problems that interfere with their learning. According to Boyer (1991), all these factors have an impact on the failure and retention rate. He also maintains, that not only have children been forgotten in our search for excellence, but society has failed

to recognize that the family may be a more imperiled institution than the school, and that many of education's failures relate to problems that precede schooling, and even birth, itself.

Planned Solution Components

In addition to the developmental kindergarten which was implemented in September 1989, and the transitional first grade which began in September 1990, the following provisions represent positive efforts toward resolving the problems related to retaining children in the primary grades at both the Norma and Olivet Schools.

Multi-disciplinary Intervention Committee

Deficiencies in basic skills are the result of a variety of complex interrelated factors. Therefore, it is necessary to give special consideration to the causes of learning problems and to draft and implement prescriptions for remediation of these deficiencies. The purpose of establishing a multi-disciplinary intervention committee was to help classroom teachers with strategies for instructing students who are experiencing learning and/or behavior problems. Since these problems result from a variety of factors that interrelate in complex and subtle ways, in-depth analysis of each child's problems is needed before remedial recommendations or referral to the Child Study Team can be made.

The committee is composed of the school nurse, two classroom teachers, one special education teacher, one member of the Child Study Team, and the building principal, who chairs the committee.

The classroom teacher requesting assistance must attend all meetings related to the referred student. Members of the committee meet with the classroom teacher to discuss problems manifested by the referred student and to develop plans for intervention strategies, timelines, and the assignment of follow up responsibilities. The work of the Intervention Committee is enhanced by capitalizing on the strengths and expertise of each individual to enhance the total skill of the team. (see Appendix A).

Staff Development

According to Porter and Brophy (1988), in the 1960's and early 1970's, scholars and policymakers concerned about educational equity and improvement did not see much need for research on teaching or for upgrading the quality of the teaching profession. Reports by Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfield, and York (1966) and Jencks, Smith, Acland, Bane, Cohen, Gentis, Heyns, and Michelson (1972) were interpreted as indicating that neither schools nor teachers made important differences in student achievement. Since the 1970's, there has been a surge of activity in research on teaching and on staff development.

Effective instruction is essential if learning is to occur. There are, however, many complex variables which serve to inhibit or promote student learning. Experiential background, attendance, motivation, physical, social, emotional, and intellectual readiness are crucial influences over which educators have little

control. Knowledge of age-appropriate expectations is essential, as is the knowledge of what is individually appropriate for the specific children in a particular class. Although universal and predictable sequences of human development exist, each child is unique in that he/she has his/her own pattern of timing and growth, individual personalities, learning styles, and family backgrounds. The recognition of individual differences dictates that a variety of teaching methods be used. Because children's backgrounds, experiences, socialization, and learning styles are so different, any one method is likely to succeed with some children and fail with others. The younger the children and the more diverse their backgrounds, the wider the variety of teaching methods and materials required, and the greater the need for staff development. During the 18 month duration of this project, staff development centered around teaching approaches and strategies which had the potential for increasing student achievement.

Writing to Read

Writing to Read, a computer based reading program, was piloted with basic skills kindergarten children in January 1991. Parent and teacher reaction to the pilot was favorable, and the program was made part of the kindergarten curriculum. A Writing to Read Lab has been developed at Norma School. Beginning with the 1992-1993 school year, all classes spend one hour in the lab.

Whole Language Instruction

Kindergarten, first, and second grade classes began implementing whole language instruction in September 1991.

Although teachers had some exposure to the philosophy and training in whole language instruction, additional staff development was needed to assist them with the transition from the traditional organization of the classroom and teaching strategies to whole language management and instruction.

The whole language approach to teaching is expected to change the present structure of the kindergarten, first, and second grade curriculum to better meet the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs and abilities of the children. The work of Piaget, Montessori, Erickson, and other child developmental theorists and researchers has demonstrated that learning results from children's own thinking and their experiences in the external world. Consequently, they acquire knowledge about their physical and social world by interacting with objects and people. They do not need to be forced to learn, since they will be naturally motivated by their own desire to make sense out of their world. By utilizing the whole language instruction in kindergarten, first, and second grade, children are provided with a stimulating and challenging experiential environment.

Chapter I Pre-School

The advantages of providing pre-school experience especially for the disadvantaged children has been documented by Elkind (1986), Spencer and Brickman (1986), Schweinhart and Weikart (1985), The National Association of State Boards of Education (1988) and many other early childhood educators and associations. All young children benefit from the opportunity to fully develop

their intellectual, emotional, and social abilities. Because disadvantaged children are less likely to receive such education at home or at school than are advantaged children, special efforts are needed to provide disadvantaged children with appropriate experiential backgrounds.

In January 1991, an application was submitted to the New Jersey Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program for money to add an extension to the Norma School. The extension would provide facilities for three Chapter I pre-school classrooms. The first two applications were not funded. On December 11, 1992, the school district received notification from the New Jersey Department of Communities Affairs that our application was approved. The school district will receive $350,000 to build the addition to Norma School. The pre-school program will be developed in the Spring of 1993. Implementation will be contingent upon completion of the facility.

Project Outcomes

When this project began, the following objectives were formulated:

Terminal Objective 1

At the end of the 1991-1992 school year, the retention rate of children in kindergarten, first, and second grade will be reduced from 7% of the population to 3%, and numerically, from 19 children to eight or less, depending on the existing population.

Process Objectives:

During the 1991-1992 school year, I will monitor programs,

instructional procedures, classroom management techniques, and student achievement through formal and informal observations, evaluations, progress reports, test results, report card grades, and standardized test scores. Tenured teachers will be formally observed and evaluated a minimum of four times. Non-tenured teachers will be evaluated and observed a minimum of six times. Where deficiencies are noted, additional observations and evaluations will be conducted. Provisions for pre-conference meetings will be made as needed.

Guidelines for annual retention conferences are held in May of each school year and will be reviewed in January 1992. Primary teachers will meet during February and April 1992, to discuss procedure, information, and documentation necessary to consider a child for retention. Additional factors and recommendations will be addressed.

A proposal will be submitted to the superintendent and the board of education in September 1991, to increase the regular kindergarten from three hours and five minutes to four hours and 25 minutes.

Research and staff development activities will be conducted on learning styles, Writing to Read, implementing a whole language approach, cooperative learning, developmentally appropriate principles, and to incorporate new teaching strategies into classroom management routine. During the 1991-1992 and the 1992-1993 school year, the time devoted to staff development for each technique will be approximately six hours.

A proposal for funding to build a Chapter I pre-school facility will be developed and submitted to the Small Cities Community Development Grant Program during the 1991-1992 school year. Upon approval, a proposal for a Chapter I pre-school program will be developed and submitted to the superintendent and board of education for consideration and implementation.

Terminal Objective 2

At the end of the 1991-1992 school year, a multi-disciplinary intervention committee will be operating at the Norma and Olivet Schools to assist classroom teachers with developmentally appropriate instructional strategies for dealing with student learning and/or behavioral concerns.

Process Objectives:

The formulation of objectives and guidelines for the Intervention Committee will be completed with staff input in September 1991. Staff members will be recuited from each school to form the committees. Formulation of each committee will be on a voluntary basis.

Appropriate forms to document the Intervention Committee meetings, plan of actions, follow-up reports, logs, and parental notification forms will be developed.

All primary teachers at Norma and Olivet Schools will be provided with copies of Principles of Appropriate Practice for Primary-Aged Children. Copies of the developmentally appropriate framework will be used to view the curriculum and its integration with other subjects, teaching strategies, the

guidance of social-emotional development, parent-teachers relations, and evaluation. Information will be taken from the position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1986).

Terminal Objective 3

At the end of the 1991-1992 school year, there will be a reduction of 15% in the number of children in grades kindergarten through second who will require Chapter I assistance. At present, 123 students, 36%, of the K-2 student population of 340 children are receiving Chapter I assistance. A 15% reduction would reduce the present Chapter I population by approximately 19 children.

Process Objectives:

The articulation between remedial and classroom instruction will be continuously monitored and revised, as needed, to accommodate changing classroom organizational procedures. Provisions for remedial and classroom teacher meetings will be scheduled on a monthly basis beginning in September 1991.

The records of children who transfer to one of the primary grades in Pittsgrove Township during the 1991-1992 and 1992-1993 school years will be carefully reviewed to determine if remedial assistance in one or more of the basic skill areas is needed. Standardized test scores, report card grades, comments of previous teachers, and parent information will assist in determining need.

Terminal Objective 4

At the beginning of the 1992-1993 school year, a new scheduling procedure and format will be utilized at Norma and Olivet Schools to facilitate the whole language approach to teaching.

Process Objectives:

During the 1991-92 school year, neighboring school districts utilizing whole language instruction in primary grades will be contacted. Provisions will be made to visit these schools and discuss scheduling procedures and concerns.

During the Summer of 1992, the writer will develop a schedule for Norma and Olivet Schools to facilitate whole language instruction.

During the Summer of 1992, records of new student transferring into the district will be carefully reviewed to determine if remedial assistance is needed in one or more basic skill areas. Scheduling of students identified will follow accordingly.

The progress of primary students entering Pittsgrove Township Schools during 1991-1992 and 1992-1993 school years will be carefully monitored and documented.

The educational program of children retained during the 1992-1993 school year and those receiving basic skills assistance will be closely monitored to assure that individual needs are met. Special efforts will be made to increase the self-concept of retained students.

During the 1992-1993 school year, the writer will continue to monitor new programs and procedures, classroom management, and student achievement through classroom evaluations, progress

reports, test results, report card grades, and test scores. Meetings will be scheduled to discuss concerns and needs.

Chapter 5

Historical Account

The goal of this project was to reduce the number of pupil retentions among Pittsgrove Township kindergarten, first, and second grade children by the end of the 1991-1992 school year. A number of objectives were involved and varied from goals manifesting immediate significance to those expected to demonstrate long term significance. Staff development activities and the implementation of current and effective instructional and organizational procedures had the immediate effect of reducing student failures during the 18 month duration of this project. The implementation of a Chapter I pre-school should have long term significance and should provide children with a solid foundation upon which to build. Staff development, inservice training, and teacher empowerment opportunities were planned to facilitate needed change and to involve teachers in decision making and in embracing new opportunities and responsibilities. Observing and evaluating teacher effectiveness and monitoring student achievement were paramount throughout the 18 month duration of this project. The following is an account of the activities involved.

Intervention Strategies

Scheduling

During the months of July and August 1991, attention was focused on preparing the 1991-1992 schedules for the Norma and

Olivet Schools. Articulating the basic skills schedule with classroom schedules provided time for classroom teachers to implement whole language activities with all children present. A review of previous schedules indicated that students involved in the basic skills program left their classroom as many as three or more times a day. Children receiving basic skills were often involved in speech correction, adaptive physical education, and other pull-out programs. Teachers voiced complaints regarding their inability to schedule reading, language, and math with all children present.

To control the interruptions in basic instruction, children were scheduled to leave their classroom before or after reading, language, and math lessons. As a result, the 1991-1992 schedules reflect time consisting of two 90 minute blocks when all students are present in the classroom. One block is available in the morning, and one block is scheduled for the afternoon.

To reduce the number of times children leave their classroom for basic skills instruction, reading and language classes were combined to give children 45 minutes of integrated instruction as opposed to two separate 25 minute lessons. Basic skills and classroom teachers have a scheduled time when they meet to coordinate instructional activities and lesson plans. In addition, supplemental materials were purchased for basic skill teachers from the same publishing companies that furnish classroom reading and math books. By coordinating the teaching of classroom subjects with basic skills instruction, the remedial

program has become more effective in helping children learn.

Review of Records

During the summer of 1992, culumative records of the four children retained in first grade were reviewed. Records of children who transfered into the district were also reviewed to assure correct grade placement. Assessment of each child's needs and abilities was made to determine if remedial instruction was needed. Every effort was made to obtain complete educational profiles on each child transfering into the district. Frequent communication with sending districts in Mississippi, Florida, New York, and Chicago was accomplished.

Kindergarten Screening

Kindergarten Round-up in Pittsgrove Township is an event occuring in March and May of each year. Parents have the opportunity to pre-register children for school in September. In addition to preliminary information obtained at this time, children are scheduled for readiness assessments which are conducted in June.

The 1991-1992 readiness assessments were administered at the Norma School in June, using a non-academic screening instrument published by Slosson Educational Publishers and known as the KRT Readiness Assessment. Scores indicate "high," "average," "low," and "below readiness" performance. Three kindergarten teachers from Norma School were hired by the Board of Education and trained by the writer to administer the test and convey the results to parents. Of the 98 children tested in June, 36 scored

"low" and "below readiness." It was the responsibility of the writer to contact the parents of these children and explain the implications of the readiness scores in light of the escalating academic demands in kindergarten. These demands, according to Shepard and Smith (1988), which placed developmentally inappropriate emphasis on teaching isolated reading and numeracy skills to young children, are the result of the large-scale social trends of the seventies. With parental consent, 31 appointments were scheduled to administer the Gesell School Readiness Test to children and to meet with parents to discuss test results and recommendations.

During the latter part of June and the beginning of July, the writer administered 31 Gesell Tests and conducted the essential follow-up conferences. Each appointment involved a minimum of two hours. The administration of the test took one half hour and an hour and a half or more was devoted to discussing implications of the scores with parents. Discussions focused on each child's stage of growth as indicated by test results and the implications for school readiness. Recommendations regarding placement followed the discussion. When necessary, parents were given additional time to consider recommendations for developmental placement.

Of the 31 children, 24 boys and seven girls, who were given the Gesell Assessment, 27 had developmental ages of four and a half. One five year old child manifested behavior patterns averaging a four year old. The developmental age of the

remaining three children was five years. Development placement was recommended for the 28 children who were chronologically five or would turn five by September 1st whose developmental age was four and a half or younger. Twenty-one parents agreed that the developmental program was in their child's best interest. The remaining seven parents refused the option and wanted their child placed in the regular kindergarten program. The 1991-1992 developmental class had 21 children participating in dual two and a half hour sessions. Eleven children, nine boys and two girls, attended the morning session and eight boys and two girls attended in the afternoon. All of these children were promoted to kindergarten for the 1992-1993 school year.

Monitoring

During the month of September 1992, attention was focused on evaluating the effectiveness of the developmental kindergarten and transitional first grade programs. Procedures used to accomplish this task took into consideration the relatively short existence of both programs in the Pittsgrove Township School District.

Developmental Kindergarten

Prior to the beginning of this project, a developmental kindergarten was implemented in 1989, to provide developmentally young children the opportunity to gain competence in cognitive, psychomotor, social, and emotional skills. The program, based on principles of child development and learning theory, fosters the total development of each child. Language, motor, personal-

social, and intellectual growth are major considerations when planning classroom learning activities and experiences. At the end of the 1991-1992 school year, the program was evaluated by the developmental kindergarten teacher, kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers, and the writer. Attention was focused on: (a) how well classroom activities and experiences met the social, emotional, and academic needs and abilities of children who participated in the program: and (b) how well the program adhered to developmentally appropriate principles. The evaluation process included reviews of program goals and objectives, organizational structure, lesson plans, classroom activities, physical arrangement of classroom materials, centers, and student assessment and achievement. Meetings were scheduled during the week of June 8, 1992, and occured during release time arranged specifically for the evaluation process.

The overall growth and achievement made by children who participated in the program was considered a major indicator of the program's effectiveness. Excluding the 1992-1993 class, 45 children have participated in the developmental kindergarten since its inception. At the end of the 1992 school year, 37 of the original 45 children remained in the district. For the 1992-1993 school year, 21 of these children are now in kindergarten, 14 children are in first grade, and 7 children are in second grade. The California Achievement Test scores of the children in second grade indicate that achievement levels in reading, language and math are above the 75th percentile. Report card

grades indicate that they have maintained A and B averages in all academic subjects. Teacher observations also characterize children who participated in the developmental prgram as being actively involved in academic and non-academic activities, self-directed, and competent. Progress reports and conferences with teachers and parents conclude that these children behave in a manner that suggests high self-esteem and positive social-emotional adjustment.

The lack of a developmental program prior to the 1989-1990 school year was one factor considered a possible contributing cause to the high retention rate. Results of the evaluation reaffirmed the author's commitment to the program.

Transitional First Grade

In September 1990, a transitional first grade class was implemented to address the needs of Pittsgrove Township children considered "high risk" students as kindergarteners. The program was designed to improve reading and math readiness, to develop oral language skills, and to increase each child's ability to listen and follow directions. Activities focus on developing gross motor and eye hand coordination, social and emotional maturity, self reliance, self control, and cooperation. The development of a positive self concept is an essential component of the program.

The program was evaluated by focusing on how effectively it has addressed the needs of its participants. Lesson plans, classroom activities, materials, organizational procedures,

student evaluations and other factors were reviewed with the transitional first grade teacher, first grade teachers, and the writer during the week of June 1, 1992. Release time was also arranged for this activity.

Since the program's inception in 1990, 21 children have participated. Twenty children presently remain in the district. Among these 20 children, 14 were initially recommended for the developmental program. Their parents refused the recommendation. These children did not meet the requirements for promotion to first grade and were, instead, promoted to the transitional class for the following year.

At the beginning of the 1992-1993 school year, 11 transitional students are presently in the first grade and 9 are in second grade. The California Achievement Test scores of these first and second grade children indicate that 19 scored above the 75th percentile in reading, language, and math. Report card grades indicate that they have maintained A and B averages in all academic subjects. Of the nine children in second grade, one child is failing reading and language. Parents have consented to Child Study Team evaluation.

Determining Transitional Placement

The names of children recommended for the transitional program are given to the building principal in May of each year. Documentation regarding each child's level of achievement, copies of progress reports, and other communications sent to parents are reviewed. With sufficient evidence documenting lack of

achievement, meetings are scheduled with parents to discuss the child's progress, needs, and possible transitional placement. Unlike the developmental program, promotion to the transitional first grade is mandatory when supported by sufficient evidence and documentation. Every attempt is made to obtain parental agreement and support for assignment to the transitional class. Parents are also encouraged to spend time observing in the classroom and to ask questions regarding the goals and objectives of lessons, activities, and the organizational arrangement of the program.

Although a review of the developmental kindergarten and the transitional first grade outcomes did not provide data for extensive evaluation, it is the writer's belief that both programs played significant roles in meeting the developmental and academic needs of the children participating and in reducing failure among kindergarten, first, and second grade children. For the present, the programs were found to be effective, as were the procedures for identifying children who would benefit.

The Kindergarten Program

Attention was also focused on the existing kindergarten program, instructional strategies, and classroom organization and management techniques employed by teachers. Prior to the writer becoming principal of Norma School in 1989, the primary kindergarten experience was academic. During the two and a half hour program, children focused on reading readiness and mathematics. Classroom instruction was organized around top,

middle, and bottom reading abilities. The classroom atmosphere enforced a sit still, sit quiet, paper and pencil environment. While one group of children received thirty minutes of reading instruction in their assigned ability group, others remained at their seats and worked quietly on various independent paper, pencil, crayon, and cutting tasks. This atmosphere forced children to conform to a rigid structure, acquire skills they were not ready for, often in ways that were inconsistent with principles of growth, development, and learning theory. Children were subjected to a rigid formal reading program with inappropriate expectations and experiences for their level of development. Little attention, if any, was given to individual development and learning styles. The pressure of the academic program did not encourage children to be risk takers, to experiment with language, or to internalize concepts about how language operates. Too much attention was placed on isolated skill development and abstract parts of the reading process to the detriment of integrating oral language, writing, and listening with reading.

The initial attempt to improve the kindergarten program occured during the 1989-1990 school year, prior to the beginning of this project. A proposal to extend the kindergarten sessions from two and a half hours to three hours and five minutes had been submitted by the writer and approved by the Board of Education. The proposal included a change in the structure of the teacher's school day. Beginning with the 1990 school year,

kindergarten teachers taught one, three hour and five minute session and provided one on one, or small group instruction to children needing individualized assistance. Teachers scheduled for morning classes provided individualized basic skills assistance to children in the afternoon session. Teachers scheduled for afternoon classes provided this assistance to children in the morning classes. This schedule provided approximately two hours of individualized instruction to children identified by their classroom teachers as in need of additional help.

In reviewing the files of these children, most had no pre-school experience, were from low socio-economic backgrounds, and/or had non-English speaking parents. The new schedule provided extra time to assist these children in attaining the level of skill adequacy needed for a successful and productive primary experience.

During the 1990-1991 school year, Norma School teachers also began the transition of moving from a traditional curriculum to a more holistic approach to teaching. A review of professional seminar topics Norma School teachers had attended indicated that, with the exception of two teachers, most had participated in one or more workshops on whole language, thematic teaching, and principles of developmentally appropriate practice. Teachers had not, however, implemented the strategies into their classroom teaching.

At the first staff meeting on September 18, 1990, the agenda

involved teachers in a discussion which served to initiate change in the kindergarten program. Teachers were lead in a discussion of the possibility of implementing whole language and cooperative learning strategies in context with developmentally appropriate principles of instruction. They were given the position statement on developmentally appropriate practices published jointly by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1986) and the Association for Childhood Education International (1986). Programs considered developmentally appropriate support attention to individual differences in children's growth patterns and rates of growth. They focus on the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of development. An integrated curriculum, active learning, and concrete manipulative materials are fundamental to learning. This position paper served as the starting point for change and helped teachers assess appropriate and inappropriate expectations for children. The paper also helped them evaluate their instructional strategies against the developmental framework.

Staff meetings which followed began with discussions of the instructional strategies teachers learned about by participating in seminars and through their readings in professional journals. The writer contributed books, cassette tapes, videos, journals, periodicials, and other materials to help establish a professional library. The beginning of a collaborative team effort united teachers and facilitated interaction toward

attaining a common goal.

At the October 23, 1990, staff meeting teachers decided to begin whole language by using a thematic approach. Thematic teaching centers the learning process around a central theme. Themes can be developed from particular books, events, or anything of special interest to the children. It is appropriate for a whole language approach because it focuses on meaning and provides a natural way for teachers to integrate subject areas. Skills are acquired in the context of a meaningful experience. At staff meetings scheduled for the third Wednesday of each month, teachers developed materials and lesson plans around themes which varied in time from one to two weeks long. They decided that all kindergarten classes would be involved with the same theme at the same time; however, classroom activities would vary. Ideas and materials were shared, and teachers worked together with new enthusiam and commitment.

The writer's responsibility was to facilitate their efforts and support the activities. At the request of teachers, money was diverted from purchasing regular text books to purchase big books and trade books to supplement whole language activities. Many resource books, thematic units, and language related materials were purchased to facilitate teaching and create new learning opportunities for the children.

Classroom teachers at Norma School were considered part time basic skills teachers since they instructed children in basic skills opposite their kindergarten class. Money for them to

attend professional workshops was available through the basic skills program and through money allocated in the budget for staff development. Teachers were, therefore, able to attend many seminars throughout the 1990-1991 school year.

Seminar information was received through the mail and posted for teachers to review. Teachers were encouraged to attend seminars in pairs, and, as a follow-up to these meetings, they were asked to make a brief presentation at the following staff meeting. During the 1990-1991 school year, each Norma teacher attended four professional seminars and shared the information with others. Seminars involved whole language, cooperative learning, and developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. Classroom teachers at the Norma School began the transition from traditional teaching during the 1990-1991 school year. They were instrumental in facilitating staff development activities for Olivet teachers during the 1991-1992 school year and during the 18 month duration of this project.

During the 1991-1992 school year, the writer was principal of Norma School and vice principal of Olivet School. At Olivet School, responsibilities included supervision of first and second grade teachers and of the first and second grade programs. The writer was responsible for all scheduling activities and was, therefore, able to begin implementing change through the scheduling process. During the 1991-1992 school year, the focus of attention was placed on the first and second grade programs, instructional strategies, and articulating the activities of both

schools.

During the 1990-1991 school year, first and second grade teachers at Olivet were aware that whole language instruction had been implemented at Norma School. They expressed a desire to plement whole language and cooperative learning strategies as well. They were to have this opportunity during the 1991-1992 school year. In the meantime, they were encouraged to experiment with techniques with which they were familiar. Olivet teachers were invited to Norma School to attend meetings, to share materials and resources, and to visit classrooms during the instructional day. As a result of this interaction, two first grade and two second grade teachers began implementing whole language and cooperative learning procedures in October 1990. Other teachers in those grade levels were not as confident and maintained their traditional classroom structure at that time.

The ground work for implement ng new instructional procedures in first and second grade began during the 1990-1991 school year. The 1991-1992 school year began, however, with substantial budget cuts. The opportunity for Olivet staff to attend professional seminars was severly limited. Norma teachers were able to continue their professional development since their seminars were paid for through Chapter I monies. This situation necessitated a change in the writer's plans, since attendance at seminars was essential to improve the teaching/learning environment and for effective implemention of whole language and cooperative learning strategies. At the staff meeting on

September 17, 1991, teachers expressed the desire to continue implementing whole language and cooperative learning techniques, whether or not they were able to attend professional seminars. They were also interested in learning styles and developmentally appropriate teaching principles. Since money was an issue, seminars had to be carefully selected. Teachers were willing to share new knowledge and materials with each other. Staff meetings, which were scheduled for the third Tuesday of each month, were devoted to working collaboratively, planning lessons and activities, developing thematic units, sharing ideas, and supporting each others efforts.

Professional Seminars

On October 8, 1991, Pittsgrove Township School teachers participated in one of two district wide in-service meetings. These meetings were made available through the work of a committee headed by the district Director of Instruction. In the beginning of the school year, all teachers in the district responded to questionnaires identifying educational issues in which they were interested. Topics receiving the most response were available. Among the session topics provided, Using Whole Language Strategies with Primary Children and Implementing Cooperative Learning Strategies in the Classroom were heavily attended by teachers representing kindergarten through fourth grade. The presenter for the whole language session was an elementary school teachers with 15 years of experience and six years as an independent seminar presenter. She provided teachers

with strategies they could implement in their classrooms with little preparation. Included in her discussion and presentation was information regarding the format of a whole language lesson, pre-reading, reading, and post reading activities, and graphic organizers which included webbing techniques, story maps, and venn diagrams. The session ended with ways to integrate whole language techniques into other areas of the curriculum.

The session on cooperative learning strategies also captured the attention of kindergarten through fourth grade teachers. The presenter, a veteran teacher with 18 years of elementary experience, spoke about the key ingredients characterizing cooperative learning groups. She described a typical cooperative learning lesson, pointing out: (a) how to organize groups to accomplish specific tasks; (b) the physical arrangement of groups; and (c) the role of the teacher. At the end of of the in-service day, teachers appeared enthusiastic and professed interest in experimenting with new procedures and activities.

Staff attendance at professional seminars during the 1991-1992 school year was minimal due to budget restrictions. As information about seminars was received, it was reviewed by first and second grade chairpeople to determine its desirability. The writer was able to send eight teachers to four seminars. Consequently, teachers made careful selections and chose participants whom they believed would benefit the most. Upon returning from each seminar, teachers made presentations at the

following staff meetings as a way of sharing the new information.

Staff meetings were not confined to building teachers. Norma teachers often attended Olivet staff meetings and offered their support, knowledge, and help in developing thematic units, lesson plans, classroom activities, and learning centers. They shared information learned at workshops and became excellent resource people for Olivet teachers.

Among the many topics discussed during staff meetings, the portfolio assessment procedures received much attention. Teachers decided not to abondon the use of classroom work and test grades documenting student achievement. They maintained a portfolio of each child's work in addition to other graded materials. Parents are able to see their child's work in progression by reviewing the contents of the portfolio. In addition to other materials, portfolios contain writing samples, a record of books the child read, graphic organizers, comprehension checks, and a monthly tape of oral reading.

Professional Conferences

On November 14, 1991, one first grade and one second grade teacher attended a seminar entitled, "Translating the Whole Language Philosophy into Practice." The workshop was sponsored by the Bureau of Education and Research, an organization known for the quality of its programs and presenters. The goal of the program was for participants to: (a) understand the whole language philosophy; (b) experience the learning power embodied in the philosophy; (c) recognize possible student outcomes; (d)

learn specific strategies for assessing student learning; (e) apply an authentic framework for assessing whole language classrooms; (f) identify the characteristics of a whole language school; including challenges of implementation and how the challenges can be met; and (g) identify the steps in translating the philosophy into practice. This information was presented to teachers during the staff meeting which followed.

On December 5, 1991, two teachers, one from first grade and one from second, attended a workshop entitled, "A Day in a Whole Language Classroom." This seminar was presented by the Society for Developmental Education, another organization respected for the quality of its programs. The goal of this seminar was to strengthen and build existing programs by providing practical ideas, techniques, strategies, and resources to create a developmentally appropriate, literature-based, primary classroom. The hands-on presentation involved teachers in all areas of the curriculum. Teachers were also provided with information for developing thematic units and literature extension ideas. Among the key topics addressed were: (a) managing time, space and materials in the classroom; (b) integrating language arts across the curriculum; (c) developing appropriate evaluation techniques; (d) encouraging journal writing and inventive spelling; (e) developing a literature rich classroom environment; (f) motivating reluctant learners; and (g) developing child-centered activities.

Olivet teachers had the opportunity to attend two additional

seminars. On January 16, 1992, two teachers attended a workshop entitled, "Cooperative Learning Strategies", sponsored by the Bureau of Education and Research. The program provided teachers with information on structuring the classroom and planning lessons to enable children to work effectively in small cooperative groups. Information regarding the positive effect cooperative learning has on students' achievement, cognitive development, oral language proficiency, problem solving, and interpersonal skill development was also provided.

The final seminar teachers attended was on the topic of learning styles. This workshop, sponsored by Frontline Associates, was held on March 24, 1991. Two Olivet teachers were introduced to a learning styles approach that could be used in every grade level and every subject area. They were presented with an overview of how to deliver instruction in a variety of ways to meet the needs inherent in diverse learning styles. Practical examples were presented to help teachers provide opportunities for children to process their learning in ways that use their individual style strengths.

To facilitate staff development, the writer's role was to provide support, direction and guidance. Monthly agendas were developed. Teachers were provided with relevant materials, resource books, cassettes, and video tapes to supplement their efforts. Teachers had the opportunity to discuss common problems and to help each other in a safe and supportive colleagial atmosphere.

A five year plan is being developed during the 1992-1993 school year. This plan requires the commitment of financial resources, school board endorsement, and administrative support for the transition to whole language instruction to be effective. Since this initiative began, teachers have been working together developing themes, planning activities, instructional strategies, and assessment procedures. A plan describing changes expected in instructional behaviors is being developed with the assistance of of reading teachers in both elementary schools. This plan will help teachers and parents envision the transition process. Since whole language creates different expectations for students, a list of objectives and portfolio assessment criteria are being developed to clearly communicate expectations for student achievement to parents. Letters have been sent home to help parents understand what is involved in the transition and to enlist their continued support and involvement. The movement toward a whole language approach to teaching requires substantial change in the way the school culture is organized and in the perception of teaching and learning.

At the October 1991 staff meeting, Olivet teachers were given the same position statement on developmentally appropriate principles was given to the Norma staff. This information has served as the basis for improving instruction at the Olivet School. As the months passed, teachers became aware that the underlying philosophy of whole language and cooperative learning is similar to the concepts underlying developmentally appropriate

practices. Each strategy encompases and supports the other. Discussions and activities at staff meetings thereafter were based on all three approaches.

On May 11, 1991, Pittsgrove Township teachers participated in a second district wide in-service program. Teachers had the opportunity to select from a number of subjects presented. They participated in a meeting entitled, "Whole Language Strategies that Build Student Literacy." The presenter discussed: (a) how to make whole language work; (b) characteristics of a successful whole language classroom; (c) characteristics of good whole language activities; (d) creating the optimal whole language environment; and (f) incorporating whole language assessment into your program. Techniques for organizing classroom activities and for including language, reading, and writing activities across the curriculum were also presented.

The second session teachers participated in during this in-service day was entitled "The Integrated Curriculum." The presenter discussed the need for school wide curriculum revision, beginning curriculum integration, teacher accountability, and student progress.

Staff development activities during the 1991-1992 school year provided teachers with a foundation upon which to build essential teaching strategies. Teachers had the confidence to experiment with their teaching, and found empowerment in sharing their ideas, experiences, problems, and in making decisions. Teachers in kindergarten, first, and second grade have adopted the whole

language philosophy as the foundation for their instructional program. Based on an understanding of how young children learn, the philosophy maintains that all language processes, i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking, are learned as a whole rather than in segrated parts. Principles of developmentally appropriate instruction have helped teachers to understand that children need time and opportunity to practice and refine the skills they are developing. They are, therefore, engaging children in a variety of meaningful learning experiences which integrate all four language processes into their daily activities. Understanding how children learn language, and providing time and meaningful learning opportunities for literacy development, will help children make more effective connections between the written and the spoken word.

In addition to implementing current instructional procedures, various programs and procedures were implemented with the intention of providing a better educational program at the elementary level. The following is an account of those strategies.

Writing to Read

During the 1990-1991 school year, the writer had the responsibility of learning about the Writing to Read program and of facilitating a pilot at the Norma School. In September 1990, two schools in Salem County were visited. Kindergarten and first grade children were observed as they worked at various stations. A one day seminar presented by the International Business Machine Corporation acquainted the writer with more details of the

program. The goal of the computer based Writing to Read program is to teach children to write what they say the way it sounds and then to read what they write. Theoretically, the purpose of the program is to teach children to read through their own writing. It represents a significant departure from the traditional approach.

The computer specialist from Olivet School was sent to a three day workshop to learn more about the Writing to Read program and how it operates. The imput from this workshop was to assist her in establishing a Writing to Read computer center at Norma School. The program and computer equipment was purchased with Chapter I money. By November 1990, the center was operational. Kindergarten teachers were trained by the computer specialist who presented them with an overview of the program and arranged time for them to work through all stations. After they became familiar with the program, they began a pilot with children in basic skills. Teachers worked in pairs with as many as eight children in the center at one time. The three hour and five minute schedule, however, permitted children to access the computer center for 30 minutes each day instead of the recommended 60 minutes.

In anticipation of favorable teacher response to the pilot, a proposal extending the kindergarten sessions from three hours and five minutes to four hours and 25 minutes was submitted to the superintendent in September 1991. The extended time would permit each kindergarten class to spend 60 minutes in the center on a

daily basis. The extended schedule would also provide time for whole language classroom instruction.

The extended kindergarten schedule was approved at the May 11, 1991, Board of Education meeting. The Writing to Read program began in January 1992. Parent orientation meetings were conducted in October 1991, and will continue as need and interest dictate. Parental response to the program has been enthusiastic.

Chapter I Pre-School

There is a need to implement a Chapter I pre-school program for four year old children who, due to low socio-economic factors and societal conditions, have difficulty meeting kindergarten entry level requirements. The varying readiness levels of incoming children and the diverse nature of the present student population necessitates a Chapter I pre-school.

In September of 1990, 1991, and 1992, the writer participated with Pittsgrove Township School District and the Township of Pittsgrove in the preparation and submission of an application to the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant Program. Money was requested to build a pre-school facility and senior citizen community center. These facilities, as additions to the Norma School, would provide essential child care services to pre-school children, particularly those from low and moderate income families. Senior citizens and the community, in general, would also benefit.

The application identified the Norma, Brotmanville, and Willow Grove communities as lacking essential services in the

immediate neighborhood. The need is further accelerated by a low level of education attained by families in these communities. Although need was evident, the first two applications did not receive funding. The 1990 and 1991 budget limit for the Public Facilities Program permitted two awards instead of the anticipated ten. In 1990, Pittsgrove Township's application ranke fourth out of 18 applications reviewed. In 1991, Pittsgrove Township ranked sixth out of 13 applications reviewed. A joint application between Pittsgrove Township and the school district was re-submitted in September 1992. On December 4, 1992, the district was notified that our application would be funded for the 1993-1994 school year.

In preparation for the implementation of a pre-school program, the writer has become familiar with the curriculum developed by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan. This program is supported by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and is based on developmentally appropriate principles. Instructional activities and daily routine provide active learning experiences for children in mathematics, language, science, art, social studies, movement, and music. The curriculum is also designed to provide children with opportunities to make choices, solve problems, and actively contribute to their own intellectual, physical, and social development. The adoption of this curriculum will facilitate continuity of developmental and instructional goals in all areas of growth as children progress through the primary grades.

Intervention Committees

In April 1982, the New Jersey Special Education Study Commission was created to conduct a review of the State's system for providing special education programs and services. A report of the Commission's findings and recommendations were presented to the State Board of Education in January 1985. In that report, the Commission identified concerns regarding the delivery of services to pupils with learning problems. Among these concerns was the limited capacity of regular education to serve pupils with mild learning and behavior problems. Consequently, the goal of the New Jersey Department of Education was to develop a plan to increase the capacity of regular education to serve these students without an over reliance on special education. This goal resulted in the formation of the Department's School Resource Committee, which was piloted in a number of schools in New Jersey between 1987 and 1990.

Although Pittsgrove Township was not involved with the School Resource Committee pilot, the writer believed a similar committee would benefit students experiencing learning and/or behavior problems. Such a committee would provide a way for staff to share their expertise, make teachers more aware of student needs, and give students having difficulty a place to go for support and assistance.

During the last week in September 1991, teachers from Norma and Olivet Schools volunteered to meet an hour each day to work on developing the purpose, objectives, and function of an

Intervention Committee. Appropriate forms were developed to facilitate the work of the committee. (see Appendix A).

Intervention Committees were established in both schools. Core committee members include the building principal who chairs the committee, two classroom teachers, one special education teacher, one member of the Child Study Team, and the school nurse. Teachers referring students must attend all meetings pertainning to the referred child. During the 1991-1992 school year, there were 21 requests for Olivet School Intervention Committee assistance. There were no requests at Norma School. Prior to each meeting, relevant information regarding the referred student was obtained by the referring teacher and submitted to the building principal. Parents of all students referred received notification through the mail regarding the time, date, and location of the meeting. Their attendance and input were requested.

The referring teacher was given the opportunity to discuss the reasons for referring a particular student. Additional information from school records and other reliable sources were considered before an initial plan of action was developed. Student progress was scheduled for review every two weeks after the initial meeting. When improvement was not evident, additional interventions were suggested and the process repeated. Where serious learning and/or behavioral problems persisted, parents were notified that a Child Study Team referral would be submitted.

Of the 21 students referred to the Intervention Committee, 18 remain in the district. Only one student has been referred to the Child Study Team for more extensive evaluation. Seventeen are progressing satisfactory. It is interesting and discouraging to note that not one parent attended any of the meetings, nor did they call to inquire about what was being done and how they might help. Lack of parental involvement contributes significantly to student failure and retention and requires additional attention.

Evaluations

Formal and informal observations and evaluations of kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers were conducted in accordance with contractual guidelines for teachers. Non-tenured teachers were formally evaluated a minumum of six times a year. Tenured teachers received a minimum of four evaluations. Where deficiencies were noted, the contract requires that additional obervations be conducted and may include pre and post observation conferences.

Formal evaluations were conducted throughout the 1991-1992 school year. Lesson plans, teacher classroom procedures, interpersonal skills, professional standards, and student perception of lessons were included among the criteria. Each classroon observation was at least one hour long. Of the 28 classroom teachers observed, all received satisfactory to excellent evaluations. Observation conferences followed within five school days after the evaluation. Conferences lasted an average of 45 minutes and provided time to discuss the lesson and

suggestions in greater detail. Teachers were informally observed on a weekly basis which allowed the writer to monitor and evaluate changes which occured. Evaluation conferences did not automatically follow the informal conferences but could be included at the request of either the teacher or the writer.

Review of Retention Conference Guidelines

In January 1992, a committee was formed to review procedures for recommending student retention and for conducting promotion and retention conferences. The committee consisted of five regular education teachers, one basic skills teacher, one special education teacher, one learning disability specialist, three parents, and the writer. Student achievement was accepted as the basis for promotion. This commitment to high academic standards was regarded as a positive method for motivating students, parents, and teachers. Furthermore, the committee ruled against promoting students who had not mastered grade level materials.

Procedures for conducting promotion and retention were also reviewed. During the first week in May, teachers submit names of students who are in danger of failing to their building principal. Accompanying this list is documentation to support their concern. All relevant information is reviewed by the building principal before meetings are scheduled with the child's parents and teachers. To assure that the final decision is in the best interest of each child, the following criteria were reviewed by a committee of teachers and parents: (a) report card grades; (b) use of standardized test scores; (c) student's age; (d)

background; (e) attendance information; (f) history of behavior, learning, or emotional problems; (g) knowledge of the English language; (h) previous retentions; (i) parental participation and school involvement; and (j) parent and student attitude about possible retention. Parental participation is important and final decisions are not always made during the initial conference. While children are often included in these meetings and in the decision making process, on many occasions, parents have requested that their child not be involved. After many factors are considered and retention is determined to be the best alternative, parental support and agreement is sought. As part of the process, names of all individuals participating in the conference are recorded for future reference.

The committee found these procedures to be effective and made the recommendation that they remain as practiced. Additional procedures will be developed during the 1992-1993 school year to monitor the on-going needs of retained students.

Summary

The major achievements attained during this 18 month project include the monitoring and development of new educational programs and working committees. Staff development activities resulted in the formation of a collaborative network of teachers who became engaged in similar growth activities which sustained their commitment to professional growth and change. This collective energy was responsible for accomplishing the major goals and objectives of this project, that of reducing retention

and failure among kindergarten, first, and second grade children. In addition, the reduction in the number of children requiring Chapter I assistance allows more children to remain in their classroom and to participate in the continuity of learning activities and experiences. The schedule for children needing supplemental instruction has been coordinated and articulated to provide continuity of instruction between classroom and basic skill teachers. These efforts have created a more effective teaching and learning environment and have facilitated the accomplishments of the goals and objectives set forth in this undertaking.

Chapter 6

Evaluation of Results and Process

This project centered on lowering the retention rate of kindergarten, first, and second grade children in the Pittsgrove Township School District. Four terminal objectives and 14 interrelated process objectives were involved over an 18 month period. This chapter provides a discussion of the results and processes used to achieve the objectives.

Terminal Objective #1:

At the end of the 1991-1992 school year, the retention rate among children in kindergarten, first, and second grades will be reduced from 7% of the population to 3%, and numerically from 19 children to eight or less, depending on the population.

At the end of the 1991-1992 school year, four first grade students (1%) of the 336 K-2 population were retained. Nine of 336 children (3%) were promoted to the transitional first grade. There were no retentions in kindergarten or second grade.

The developmental kindergarten and transitional first grade programs were significant in reducing retentions among primary grade children and provided cognitive as well as affective support for those who participated. Although participation in extra year programs remains controversial, Pittsgrove Township School District supports these programs and does not consider participation in either a retention.

Process objectives to achieve this goal were interrelated and important to the success of this goal. The first process

objective involved the writer with the task of consistently monitoring new and existing primary programs, new instructional procedures, classroom management techniques, and student achievement through formal and informal observations, evaluations, and conferences with teachers. Student progress reports, test results, and report card grades were reviewed at the mid-point and end of each marking period.

During the 1991-1992 school year, a total of 21 kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers were formally and informally observed and evaluated. Their ability to implement new programs and instructional procedures, to effectively organize classroom activities and learning experiences, and to interact with the children were assessed. Twenty-four tenured teachers were formally evaluated four times during the school year. Four non-tenured teachers received six formal evaluations. Each evaluation was followed by a conference, at which time details of the lesson were reviewed, questions were asked, recommendations and suggestions were discussed. Results of the evaluation data indicated that teachers were effectively implementing whole language and cooperative learning techniques. Test scores indicated that the quality of instruction and student achievement had increased.

New and existing programs and procedures were evaluated to determine their effectiveness, to make needed changes and improvements, and/or to discontinue their use. The developmental kindergarten, transitional first grade, and kindergarten programs

were evaluated, found to be effective, and will, essentially, remain the same. A review of the promotion and retention policy and procedures was undertaken to determine the adequacy of criteria used. The committee of teachers and parents who volunteered for this task was familiar with the controversy regarding promotion and retention issues. Committee discussions revolved around the advantages and disadvantages of retaining children or advancing them to the next grade regardless of academic achievement. Contrary to recommended research on this issue, the committee concluded that retention was a viable alternative for some children at the kindergarten, first, and second grade levels. Beyond those grades, they believed, retention would not remediate a child. The committee's work validated the criteria and procedures used to make promotion and retention decisions. These procedures were determined to be fair, consistent, and sensitive to the needs of individual students.

The second process objective involved a proposal for extending the kindergarten program from three hours and five minutes to four hours and 25 minutes. The proposal, submitted to the superintendent and the board of education, elaborated the need and specific purpose for extending the day. Specifically, additional time was needed to enable each kindergarten class to use the Writing to Read center 60 minutes each day and to facilitate whole language instruction. The proposal was accepted, and the new schedule went into effect for the 1992-1993 school year.

The third and fourth process objectives involved staff development in whole language, cooperative learning, learning styles, and principles of developmentally appropriate practice. In addition to these areas of professional development, Norma teachers received in-service training enabling them to manage the Writing to Read Center. Budget restraints imposed on the school district during the 1991-1992 school year severly limited the number of professional conferences and seminars teachers attended. Initial plans for staff development included attendance at numerous workshops and opportunities to share information acquired. These plans were modified and building staff meetings became the major arena for professional growth. The collective experience and knowledge of teachers became the basis of staff development activities.

During the year, teachers who attended workshops on cooperative learning and developmentally appropriate practices returned and provided in-service experience for teachers who did not have the opportunity to attend. Prior to the 1991-1992 school year, all kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers had some exposure to whole language. Seven teachers had attended workshops but did not implement the strategies. Staff meetings proved to be an effective forum for teachers to share what they knew, discuss ways of implementing whole language, and support each other. They made decisions about traditional teaching procedures, discussed the elimination of reading groups, evaluated different forms of assessment, and considered other

planning and organizational functions. Olivet teachers decided to modify their use of the basal reader purchased by the district as a way of initially implementing whole language teaching strategies until they felt more confident with the approach.

Lesson plans eventually showed evidence that the focus on reading was becoming more holistic through the use of themes. Activities built on the experiential background of children. Writing activities were incorporated into reading lessons on a daily basis, and children began to author and illustrate their own versions of stories. As lesson plans focused on whole language, cooperative learning opportunities became apparent in the extension and planning of learning activities. Principles associated with developmentally appropriate expectations and learning experiences were also apparent. Children were actively involved and engaged in meaningful activities. Irrelevant paper and pencil drill and practice activities were almost totally eliminated. Losing the attention of children in the "bottom" reading group was a major concern of teachers. However, they discovered that students from the so called "bottom" of class responded enthusiastically to being included in all learning experiences. They were highly motivated and experienced success along with the other children.

Implementating whole language and cooperative learning strategies resulted in movement toward a child-centered, holistic philosophy of teaching and learning. The learning environment at both the Norma and Olivet Schools is primarily contextually,

socially determined, and constructive in nature. Children have been provided with a wide range of meaningful experiences which integrate language arts across subject matter areas. In the process, children are becoming better learners and are more responsive to their work.

The long-term effectiveness of staff development on student learning cannot be determined at this time. Teachers are in the process of learning how to integrate new instructional procedures and effectively pace activities to help children to more effectively acquire, apply, and consolidate new skills and concepts. At the end of the 1993-1994 school year, programs and procedures will be reviewed. It is expected that a noticeable difference will be apparent in the writing and reading ability of kindergarten, first, and second grade children and in their over-all level of achievement.

The final process objective associated with Terminal Objective #1 involved submitting a joint application with Pittsgrove Township to the Small Cities Community Block Grant Program for funding to build a pre-school facility. Three applications were submitted. Each application included a description of the project, documentation regarding need and cost, and a description of the benefits low and moderate income families would receive. The first two applications were not funded. On December 4, 1992, the district recieved notification that the application submitted at the beginning of the 1992-93 school year would receive funding. Plans for the facility and

pre-school program have begun.

The goal of Terminal Objective #1 was to reduce the number of children being retained. Five process objectives attempted to achieve results within the 18 month duration of this project. Whole language and cooperative learning strategies were the focus of staff development. Teachers were encouraged and supported in their efforts to begin implementing classroom and organizational procedures associated with these teaching methods. Continuous monitoring of classroom instruction, student achievement and program results provided teachers with administrative support, assistance, and guidance throughout the year.

Process objectives which extended the kindergarten program and enabled funding for a pre-school facility will assure better learning environments for children in the years ahead. These objectives will permit Pittsgrove Township to offer a greater variety of programs to meet the needs of all children.

Terminal Objective #2

At the end of the 1991-1992 school year, a multi-disciplinary intervention committee will be operating at the Norma and Olivet Schools to assist classroom teachers with developmentally appropriate instructional strategies for dealing with student learning and/or behavioral problems.

The objectives and guidelines regarding the purpose, composition, and processes of the Intervention Committee were discussed and developed by teacher volunteers from Norma and Olivet Schools. Teachers met after school during the last week in September 1991. Procedural steps for referring children to

the Intervention Committee, forms requesting intervention assistance, meeting logs, parent letters, and follow-up forms were developed by this group.

In October, a request for teacher volunteers to form two core Intervention Committees was met with more than sufficient response. An Intervention Committee was formed in each school. Members included the building principal, two teachers, one learning disability specialist from the Child Study Team, one special education teacher, and the school nurse. During that year, Norma teachers did not refer children to the Committee. The services of the Olivet team were used. The committee's work was effective in assisting teachers having difficulty. Many of the problems children had were related to conditions at home and in their immediate neighborhood. Other problems were related to poor self esteem. The special attention and gestures of friendship extended to the children by committee members were presumed to be significant in effecting behavioral changes and increasing attention to learning.

Since the formation of the Intervention Committees, the writer received notification that on July 1, 1992, the State Board of Education had mandated that all New Jersey school districts establish Pupil Assistance Committees. These committees were to be established and operational by the 1994-1995 school year. The purpose of the Pupil Assistance Committee will be to help teachers respond to a broad range of academic and behavioral needs of students in the classroom. The composition

and function of the committee will be similar to that of the Intervention Committee. Although the name of the committee will be changed in 1994, it will perform the same valuable service. The goal of Terminal Objective #2 was to establish an on-going support network for students and teachers. The objective has been accomplished and is in effect.

Terminal Objective #3

At the end of the 1991-1992 school year, there will be a reduction of 15% in the number of children in grades kindergarten through second who will require Chapter I assistance.

During the 1990-1991 school year, 110 students, 34% of the K-2 population of 320 children received Chapter I assistance. A 15% reduction would reduce the Chapter I population by approximately 16 children. At the end of the 1991-1992 school year, 83 children, 24% of the K-2 student population of 336 children required supplemental instruction based on California Achievement Test scores in reading, language, and math. To achieve the desired results, materials used for Chapter I instruction were purchased from the same companies as were classroom text books and materials. This permitted the articulation of instruction between the classroom and the remedial program. In addition, the number of times and the time children left their room for remedial instruction were scheduled so they did not miss language arts or math activities in their classroom. Remedial classes were scheduled immediately before or after classroom instruction in language and math, and lessons were coordinated to reinforce classroom instruction.

Consequently, children were able to spend more time in their classroom participating in whole language and cooperative learning activities.

By the end of the 1991-1992 school year, results of the California Achievement Test administered to first and second grade children in May indicated that the number of children needing remedial assistance had decreased. In first grade, of 119 children, 11 reading, two language, and six math scores were in the bottom 25th percentile. In second grade, of 109 children, 14 reading, six language, and four math scores were in the bottom 25th percentile. In some instances, the same individual received scores in the 25th percentile or below in two or more subject areas. Consequently, 32 children in the first and second grades required remedial assistance based on these test scores as compared with the year before. In kindergarten, teachers recommended that 26 children receive supplemental instruction. Based on this information, the number of children needing remedial instruction has been dramatically reduced. Twenty-five additional children were placed in the Chapter I program on teacher recommendation and parental approval. Their California Achievement Test scores did not require their participation.

Positive teacher reaction to changes made in scheduling indicate that reducing the number of interruptions created by children leaving and entering the room enabled them to develop better daily and weekly plans and to provide a more effective learning environment. These changes have achieved the purpose

intended.

Terminal Objective #4

At the beginning of the 1992-1993 school year, a new scheduling procedure and format will be utilized at Norma and Olivet Schools to facilitate the whole language approach to teaching.

A number of activities were involved in accomplishing this task. An inquiry into the scheduling practices of other districts employing whole language offered little assistance. Teachers in schools contacted indicated that they schedule whole language activities themselves around pull-out programs and special classes.

At the end of July 1992, the schedules for Norma and Olivet Schools were developed and ready for implementation. Beginning the 1992-1993 school year, two 90 minute blocks of uninterrupted time were incorporated into all classroom schedules at both schools. The blocks allow time for language arts and the integration of language skills into oth r areas via large curricular themes. The use of themes provided a focal point for inquiry, for the use of language skills, and for cognitive development in all areas of the curriculum. This organization of time has enabled all children to participate in whole language and cooperative learning classroom activities.

During the summer of 1992, records of students transferring into the district were carefully reviewed. Attempts were made to match perceived needs of students with teacher strengths. Students who tested into Chapter I were scheduled in the program. Every effort was made to assure that children received the

support services needed to enable them to experience success.

Many changes have occured during the 18 months of this project. Programs and staff development activities are continuing during the 1992-1993 school year. Third and fourth grade teachers are involved in the same staff development activities as were the first and second grade teachers. Money is available for teachers to attend professional seminars. Teachers are sharing their new knowledge and experiences with each other. Change and improvement are expected to be continuous and on-going.

Refections on Solution Strategies

The ultimate goal of this project was to reduce the retention rate among kindergarten, first, and second grade students in the Pittsgrove Township School District. Factors relating to the problem were identified as the lack of pre-school experience, developmental age factors, increased academic expectations, the absence of a full or extended day kindergarten program, developmentally inappropriate instruction, classroom management and organizational factors. Social and environmental variables contributing to the problem were attributed to family transience, low socio-economic family background, behavior and learning difficulties, and limited experiential background.

The solution strategies effectively accomplished what was intended. The Writing to Read program and the extended day kindergarten program cannot be evaluated at this time. At the end of the 1992-1993 school year, these programs will be reviewed, evaluated, and improved to assure that needs of children are

met. The implementation of the Chapter I pre-school will provide children from low and moderate income families experiences they might otherwise not receive. Hence, they are expected to have a better chance to take advantage of learning opportunities.

The developmental kindergarten and the transitional first grade programs played an essential role in reducing retentions. The developmental program provided children with time to increase readiness for kindergarten. The transitional first grade program reinforced and extended knowledge and skills necessary for a successful first grade experience. It is believed that these program will contribute to producing confident, well adjusted, capable children who are interested in learning.

Professional growth and development was the basis for improving the teaching/learning environment. Teachers elected to learn about whole language, cooperative learning, developmentally appropriate practices, and learning styles. They were provided with the opportunity to form a collegial network for support and were encouraged to attend professional seminars. The assistance they received from each other was rewarding and valuable. Limitations imposed by budget cuts did not hinder staff development or the implementation of new programs and teaching strategies needed to facilitate whole language and cooperative learning activities.

Implementation Design

Terminal and process objectives selected to reduce the number

of retentions in the kindergarten, first, and second grades were effective and addressed the teaching/learning conditions at both the Norma and Olivet Schools. Consideration was given to the influence of existing programs, scheduling procedures, teacher evaluations, instructional strategies, classroom management, and organizational structures. Obtaining funds to provide a pre-school program for economically disadvantaged children has been a major goal. Participation in a high quality pre-school will have benefits, but pre-school experience alone will not be sufficient to prevent school failure. Implications of developmental age factors and the implementation of whole language, cooperative learning, and developmentally appropriate instruction provide a framework within which to improve instruction and the quality of education.

Extending the length of the kindergarten day, implementing a staff development program, and scheduling changes were among the strategies which assisted in creating a more effective teaching/ learning environment. On-going responsibilities within both the Norma and Olivet Schools were planned to assure that administrative support and leadership would facilitate staff development, teacher empowerment, and instructional change. Provisions were also made to monitor programs, articulate schedules, and evaluate teacher effectiveness. Activities were planned on a monthly basis, and the time line provided a schedule for initiating process objectives.

Building on teachers' knowledge and experience, extending

opportunities for them to solve problems, make decisions, and work collaboratively in groups empowered teachers and firmly established their commitment to change. Although budget constraints limited teacher attendance at professional seminars, the collaborative effort of the staff filled the gap for the time being. Plans for staff development could have been more effective if the writer took into consideration the possibility of budget cuts. Regardless, the project was planned, implemented, and accomplished within the specified timeline.

Implications of Outcomes and Processes

The plan to reduce the retention rate among the kindergarten, first, and second grade children resulted in moving away from many traditional norms of teaching to implementing a whole language approach. Whole language theory grew out of research about the reading process and language development. Its teaching strategies are rooted in child-centered, integrated, developmentally appropriate, and whole-child learning experiences. Kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers have changed the organization of their classrooms, their teaching strategies, and assumptions they held about teaching and learning to reflect this philosophy. Children are engaged in talking, reading, writing, and experimenting with ideas that are most significant to their daily lives. Such experience has tremendous potential for challenging their thinking and expanding their language into new genres, new topics, and new ideas. These activities have provided teachers with a vehicle for understanding children's

growing knowledge, concepts, and belief systems. Teachers share a common philosophy and a common set of criteria based on theory and research. In addition, whole language has brought new energy and enthusiam into the teaching/learning process, Educators who have implemented its philosophy point to the high levels of student achievement as the major impetus for adopting the approach.

Three key elements were necessary to implement a whole language approach. They included financial resources, school board endorsement, and administrative support. Budget constraints during the 1991-1992 school year limited financial resources needed to purchase whole language materials for Olivet teachers and enable them to attend professional seminars. These constraints, however, did not hinder the accomplishment of objectives nor did they reduce the level of enthusiam among teachers. Collaborative working relations were established between Norma and Olivet teachers and among teachers in the same building. They shared common problems and collective solutions. They had the responsibility and autonomy to make decisions, solve problems, and generate new ideas. In the process, they received recognition from their colleagues and administrator. It is the writer's belief that collaborative working relations established the climate needed to accomplish all objectives. According to Liebermann (1986), establishing a climate to foster change and improvement requires cooperative work, increased interaction among teachers, and new modes of collaboration to

replace isolated working conditions in schools. Although reducing the retention rate among the kindergarten, first, and second grade children was the ultimate goal of this project, improving staff relationships and developing a professional and collaborative culture was fundamental to the process. Barth (1986), asserted that schools have the capacity to improve themselves if the conditions are right. Conditions to promote and sustain learning among the staff and children are present and will continue.

Chapter 7

Decision on the Future of the Interventions

The strategies used to reduce retention among kindergarten, first, and second grade children in Pittsgrove Township during the 18 month duration of this project were effective. The implemention of a whole language approach, which incorporated cooperative learning and developmentally appropriate principles, has contributed significantly to creating a more effective teaching and learning environment. The evaluation and improvement of programs, instructional procedures, and all strategies implemented during this project will continue and be modified as need dictates. The research opposing participation in extra year programs such as developmental kindergarten and transitional first grade consistently maintains that positive effects are eliminated in later years. With this in mind, the growth and achievement of participants from both programs will be monitored and evaluated on an on-going basis. Results of the evaluation process and information from new research data will assist in determining the validity of the programs. For the present, the writer is commited to both.

Staff development in whole language, cooperative learning, and portfolio assessment will be emphasized. In September 1992, a committee composed of one teacher from each grade level, kindergarten through fourth, two elementary reading teachers, and the writer, was formed to develop a five year plan for

integrating whole language instruction into other areas of the curriculum. The committee meets after school twice each month to revise the curriculum from kindergarten to grade four, assessment procedures, and desired student outcomes. A description of expected changes in instructional behaviors is being developed to help teachers and parents envision the transition from traditional teaching and the expectations of the more innovative, developmentally oriented whole language approach.

Additional Application

Fifth and sixth grade teachers at the Pittsgrove Township Middle School are aware of the whole language approach being used in the lower grades. They have expressed a desire to implement whole language procedures, as well. To accommodate their request and to provide training, these teachers will be offered the opportunity to attend eight 90 minute workshops. The sessions will be held after class at Olivet School during the months of April and May, 1993. Teachers will be paid one hundred dollars each for attending all sessions. Twenty-eight teachers have registered for these sessions.

During the 1992-1993 school year, the writer will develop a pre-school program which will be implemented when the pre-school facility is completed. In addition to the pre-school program, child-centered and family-centered programs are needed for the district's at-risk infants and toddlers. A family-centered intervention program would provide parents with training and

materials to stimulate childrens' cognitive development, help with discipline and health problems, and increase parents' vocational and home management skills. According to Sternberg (1985), studies involving children from birth to age three demonstrated that IQ is nct a fixed attribute. It can be modified by placing children in a stimulating, developmentally appropriate setting for a portion of the day. To assure that children will be ready for school and to reduce the failure and retention rate, these services must be provided. A proposal addressing this issue will be presented to the superintendent and Board of Education in September 1993.

Dissemination of Information about Benefits

Channels of communication between the schools and community are effective. Teachers who accept responsibility for public relations in each building are responsible for sending information about school programs, activities, and events to local newspapers. In addition, the school district mails a monthly newspaper to all residents of the township. The newspaper contains information about activities occuring in the schools. Dates, times, and the location of meetings are included. Residents are welcome at all meetings. In addition to these methods, Pittsgrove Township has a Community Involvement Committee which meets monthly to discuss issues of interest or concern to residents. The committee, chaired by the district's Director of Instruction, is composed of parents and township residents. Monthly agendas are developed in response to resident requests, and meetings are open to everyone.

These meetings have been an effective forum for disseminating information.

The most effective method of disseminating information has been through parents. Parental involvement at both schools is very high. Parents have been initially involved in the implementation of whole language, Writing to Read, and other programs. Parents have witnessed their children's growth as it is reflected in the quality of their work and their enthusiam for school. Monthly PTA meeting offer an excellent forum to discuss the changes and benefits of this project. In addition, these meetings provide the writer with parent reaction and input, they facilitate open ended discussions, and have established a more effective partnership between home and the school.

Recommendations

This project was designed to reduce the retention and failure rate at the Norma and Olivet Schools and has resulted in improved teaching and learning conditions at both schools. I would establish the same objectives and implement the same procedures if the project were to be repeated. A number of favorable conditions were in place at the beginning of this project. I knew many of the Norma and Olivet teachers since the early seventies and have worked as their colleague, president of the teacher's association, vice-principal, and, finally, their principal. Friendship, mutual trust, respect, and collegial partnership facilitated and sustained professional development and resulted in improving students' experiences and learning.

Activities undertaken by the staff were invested with the spirit of inquiry. Staff development opportunities provided teachers with new skills, encouraged experimentation with new teaching strategies and organizational procedures, and provided recognition for their efforts. They worked on the assumption that classroom improvement, professional development, and school improvement must be linked if substantial change in the teaching/learning environment was to be achieved. These working conditions were essential and facilitated the accomplishment of all objective involved with this project.

In reference to staff development, in addition to attending professional seminars, recommendations would include provisions for after school staff development activities similar to the whole language workshop extended to fifth and sixth grade teachers. This would allow more teachers to participate and collaborate with each other during the workshop and during the implementation process. Release time for teachers to plan and coordinate activities should be scheduled into the school day. Although teachers worked effectively after school hours, release time would establish more professional working conditions and could even increase staff commitment to change.

Administrators in districts concerned with the issue of retention need to examine the teaching/learning environment that exists in their school. Effective planning, staff development, collaborative decision making, teacher empowerment, and administrative support and encouragement are essential

ingredients for change. Collaborative opportunities must be provided to break teacher isolation and help to make them receptive to new ideas, to increase professional confidence, and to strengthen the commitment to change and improvement. If these conditions are not present, effective and lasting change will not occur. Teachers must take ownership of the process and be given credit for their efforts.

This project was very significant to the writer both personally and professionally. My role as principal has enabled me to actively engage teachers with each other and allow them the autonomy and responsibility to grow and develop professionally. Group effort was sustained and maintained through confidence in our relationship with each other, through the spirit of collaboration, and through the mutual commitment for change and professional growth.

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Appendices

Appendix A

PITTSGROVE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS
R.D. #1 ELMER, NEW JERSEY 08318

OLIVET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Olivet School Intervention Committee

What is the Olivet School Intervention Committee?

The Olivet School Intervention Committee is a school-based, problem-solving group whose purpose is to assist teachers with strategies for dealing with students and learning and/or behavior problems. This group seeks creative ways to maximize the use of available regular education resources. Members of the committee function in collaboration, capitalizing on the strengths of each individual to enhance the total skill of the team.

What does the committee provide?

All schools can benefit from implementing school-based decision making. School Intervention Committees serve as a vehicle to provide instructional programs through collaborative problem solving. It also can enhance existing methods of operating within the school organization to assist students with learning and/or behavior problems.

In particular, assistance by a School Intervention Committee is viewed as appropriate because it:

Provides an efficient and effective means of assisting classroom teachers and students

Provides moral and peer support to teachers

Provides a vehicle for the faculty to share their expertise in dealing with a variety of learning and behavioral problems

Offers structured support and assistance to teachers by providing instructional strategies to promote pupil competence

Provides teachers with teaching/learning opportunities that can become a permanent part of their repertoire. This may help them deal with learning problems that will arise in the future

Enables the school's instructional program to meet a broader range of pupil's needs.

Provides an efficient, flexible, and cost effective problem-solving alternative to special education referrals within the regular education framework.

Olivet School Intervention Committee is based upon the following assumptions:

Regular classroom teachers have valuable skills and knowledge to assist students experiencing academic difficulties

It is more effective to work together than alone

Teachers benefit from a better understanding of learning problems which do not require special education and

When teachers are given a support system, they can multiply their effectiveness.

PITTSGROVE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS
R.D. #1, ELMER, NEW JERSEY 08318
OLIVET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Olivet School Intervention Committee

Purpose

1. To develop alternative strategies for students who are experiencing learning and/or behavior problems.
2. To utilize the expertise of staff members to develop materials and methods to assist academically or behaviorally troubled students.
3. For the student to receive the services necessary to improve his/her status in the regular schøøl program.

Composition

A building administrator as chairperson
Intervention Committee - two teachers
A teacher who has the student
A Child Study Team Member

Process

1. School staff member(s) develop referral to committee and submits to Chairperson. Parent notification in writing.
2. At meeting, committee developes a plan of intervention strategies. This would include timelines and assignment of responsibilities. Parent notification.
3. Plan is implemented, monitored and committee meets to consider options:
   a. Generation of new strategies and materials
   b. Referral for other intervention avenues such as outside counseling, CST referral, etc.
   c. Inform parents.

PITTSGROVE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS
R.D. #1 ELMER, NEW JERSEY, 08318
OLIVET ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Procedural Steps for Referral to Intervention Committee

1. Exhaust all other avenues before referral to Intervention Committee.

   a. Parent-teacher conferences in which alternatives are discussed.
   b. Teacher-supervisor conferences regarding the problem and suggested solutions.
   c. Review of cumulative school records, including attendance, retentions, and test scores.
   d. Alternative strategies in the classroom.

2. Submit referral to principal.

3. Attend Committee meeting.

   a. Educational Interventions suggested
   b. Monitor assigned from committee
   c. Parent notified through the mail of suggested interventions

4. Monitor will follow-up with teacher on effectiveness of interventions before the students progress is reviewed.

   a. Revisions to strategies will be suggested
   b. Referral to Child Study Team will be made if necessary.

REQUEST FOR OLIVET SCHOOL INTERVENTION COMMITTEE ASSISTANCE

Student_____Sex____Birthdate_____Age____

Date_____Teacher_____Grade_____

Presenting problems: Describe what the student is doing or not doing which causes concern.

What strategies have been tried to alleviate this (these) problems?

Parent contacts - Dates and summary of parent contact/ conferences.

Contact - with other school personnel (principal, CST members, etc.)
Dates:

NOTE: Please review cumulative file for an educational history. Please attach pertinent data, work samples, and student schedules if applicable and indicate other people who may be helpful in addressing your concern.

PITTSGROVE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS
OLIVET SCHOOL INTERVENTION COMMITTEE
EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

Name:_____ Grade:_____

Date of Committee Meeting:_____ Teacher:_____

Olivet School Intervention Committee recommended the following interventions:

_____Adaptive Materials_____

_____

_____Alternative Instructional Materials_____

_____

_____Seating Change

_____Behavior Management Techniques

_____Remedial Reading _____Remedial Math _____Remedial Writing _____Testing

_____Speech and Language Evaluation

_____Speech Therapy

_____Tutoring (peer or volunteer)

_____Counseling in school _____Private Counseling

_____Change in Class Schedule_____

_____Regular Parent Contact

___daily ___weekly ___monthly ___notes ___phone

_____Review of cumulative records

_____Teacher Consultation with Child Study Team Member

_____Observation in classroom by Principal or Child Study Team Member

_____Retention

_____Extra Curricular Activities_____

_____Other_____

_____

Participants Chairperson_____

Member_____

Member_____

Member_____

Member_____

Assigned Monitor_____

The above interventions will be reviewed on:_____

Interventions: ____effective ____not effective____to be continued ___Referred to Child Study Team for full evaluation. Date_____

c Building principal
Teacher
Monitor
Parent
Intervention folder

SCR LOG

Meeting Date	Student	Interventions	Review Date

POSSIBLE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

_____small group instruction

_____individualized instruction with
_____teacher _____peer _____volunteer

_____limit auditory distractions: sometimes use earphones, ear plugs, etc.

_____limit visual distractions, remove all things from desk except material working on

_____study carrel

_____assignment notebook

_____keep in school at recess or after school to complete assignments

_____folders to organize assignments

_____return assignments that are carelessly completed

_____verbal reminders to improve work habits

_____immediate check and reinforcement of assignements

_____peer check of assignments

_____use timer to speed up work

_____frequent breaks between assignments

_____oral tests when necessary

_____use mnemonic clues to learn unrelated facts

_____use visual aids

_____use listening/verbal activities - tape recorders verbal discussions

_____use tactual-kinesthetic activities

_____use concrete examples

_____frequent review of newly presented materials

_____repeat/rephrase or shorten verbal instructions

_____provide visual stimuli when giving oral instructions

_____provide options for independent work

_____combine whole word/phonetic approach in reading activities

_____language experience charts

_____dervive reading materials from other subjects of interest to the student

_____use computer lab

_____use manipulatives and concrete examples in math

_____limit number of problems student is required to complete

_____Use graph paper to help with proper alignment of numbers

_____individualize spelling list from student errors

_____de-emphasize spelling when the primary objective is content

_____right-lined paper to provide clearly defined boundries to aid organization

_____limit amount of copying from the board

_____establish ample praise consistently for progress

_____establish physical clues for appropriate progress

_____clearly define and enforce limits and expectations

_____develop specific goals for academic improvement with student

_____develop specific goals for behavioral improvement with student

_____use written contract approach

_____positive reinforcement when feelings are expressed

_____time out system established for negative or inappropriate behavior

_____discuss specific ways of behaving in situations

_____discuss alternatives to unacceptable behavior

_____ignore inappropriate behavior when possible

_____encourage activities and projects which have a high interest and possibility for accomplishment

_____change activities or redirect when child is reaching frustration limit

_____avoid reprimanding the student in front of peers

_____teach study skills

_____other_____

_____

_____

_____

INTERVENTION FOLLOW-UP REPORT

Part 1: To be completed by assigned monitor:

Name:_____ Date:_____

Grade:_____ Teacher:_____

Interventions attempted:

When implemented:

What has happened since the intervention:
(problem solved, not solved, redefined?)

Obstacles to implementations:

Further comments and interventions- suggested modifications:
(by teacher)

Part 2: To be used at follow-up intervention meeting.

Further recommendations: (who will do what, when, and how often)

Date:

PITTSGROVE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

Olivet Elementary School
R.D. #1, Box 280
Elmer, New Jersey 08318-8904

(609) 358-2081

Dear

The Olivet School Intervention Committee will be meeting on _____to discuss your child,_____. We will inform you of the results of the meeting and send you copies of the recommendations. Your attendance at the meeting will be welcomed and beneficial.

We are certain you will be pleased with the work of the concerned people who are members of the Olivet School Intervention Committee. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call me at 358-2081.

Sincerely

PITTSGROVE TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

Olivet Elementary School
R.D. #1, Box 280
Elmer, New Jersey 08318-8904
(609) 358-2081

Dear

We are pleased to provide a copy of your child's Olivet School Intervention Committee results for this school year. The committee met periodically to establish procedures, monitor student progress, and make recommendations for your child.

A copy of the Educational Intervention report is enclosed for your information. If you have any concerns about this report or regarding the work of the Intervention Committee, please call the school.

Sincerely,

Leadership Agenda

Overview

My personal and professional life are, in essence, one in the same. When I began my graduate work in Human Development at Fairleigh Dickinson University in 1969, I was quite a different person than I am now. At that time I was at a very critical place in my life and growth was crucial. I am quite aware of the changes that have affected my personal life and consequently my professional self in that I experience the world, myself, and others differently than before. In essence, through my experiences in the Human Development Program, my involvement with psychoanalysis, Arica Training, Rolfing, Life Spring, Bio-Energetics, and other growth growth experiences, my growth and change came about with the disintegration of one way of experiencing the world, followed by a reorganization of those experiences.

In the early 70's I knew little about the Human Potential Movement and its implications for growth and development. What I did know, however, was that I did not care to continue with my level of existence. Through various readings of Lowen, Perls, Jourard, Maslow, Rogers, and other humanistic leaders, I became acquainted with the humanistic philosophy and engrossed myself in the movement. I eventually realized that personal growth only takes place

when one is willing to risk and dares to become involved by experimenting with his or her life. Growth for me had not only rewards and pleasures, but many deep intrinsic pains and will always have. It required a great deal of strength and courage on my part as well as protection, permission and encouragement from the environment.

I have experienced a real metamorphosis in my personal life throughout the years. As a consequence, it became extremely important for me, early in my teaching career, to provide children with positive experiences in the school setting which would enhance their growth and self concept. After some research, I became acquainted with the Ford Esalen Project on affective and confluent teaching practices. I utilized their program which aided me to help children become aware of their feelings, learn effective ways to handle emotions, and enhance their self concept in the teaching learning situation as part of that curriculum. At that time, having reached the point in my personal and professional life which allowed me to create a classroom atmosphere free and open to all kinds of expressions and experiences, it remains one of my most rewarding achievements. Wanting to create this atmosphere throughout the school was the motivating force which enabled me to obtain a master's degree in administration in addition to the one I have in Human Development, and to persue a

doctorate in Educational Leadership.

I believe I am a person who strives for excellence in all I do, personally as well as professionally. I have clear, active, ambitious, performance oriented goals for myself, my staff, my school, and for the children. I believe I am intellectually and emotionally commited to meeting challenges, encourage achievement, and help unite the school community in a shared dedication to children and excellence. I do not believe I am unique in this quest since many others share my desire for change, improvement, and excellence.

I became an administrator with the intention of making a difference especially in the lives of children. I believe I have an excellent understanding of what children need and of how many of those needs can be effectively met by the public school. During the nine years I have been an administrator, I have made a positive difference in the school atmosphere. I have influenced student learning, developed motivational strategies, provided situations whereby students accept more responsibility for their behavior and learning, improved the quality of the curriculum, resource materials, and classroom teaching. I have influenced teacher preparation, granted teachers more autonomy within the context of professional standards, and have developed better collaboration between faculty members. As a result, teachers share increased

willingness to become involved and to accept greater responsibility in the educational process. I place great value on public education and feel the needs of children are not being met to the degree that is possible. In my domain, I have some influence and intend to make that influence as positive and productive as I possibly can. Furthermore, I believe personal and professional growth is a lifelong venture and reaffirms man as the shaper of his own boundless possibilities in a continuous act of self creation.

Improved Leadership Dimensions

The following represents my attempt to analyze growth in my leadership style and abilities in relation to who a I am personally and professionally. The thinking process involved in writing this paper has made me aware of improved strengths and weaknesses to be improved. I have given much thought to those areas needing improvement and believe that my awareness of those areas as well as my desire to improve will enable me to direct the process of change and growth. In addition, I believe that given time and more experience, I will continuously provide the kind of leadership and support needed during these changing times.

Planning and Organizing

My planning and organizing skills had to be almost totally revamped when I became an administrator. Demands on my time

changed considerably. To me, my world became filled with inconsistency, unexpected events, meetings, paper work, and more responsibilities. Although I was prepared for all appointments and meetings, I felt I was not accomplishing all I needed to during the day. Much of my work accompanied me home and home became an extension of my office. This created additional problems and added more stress to my life. During this project, I learned the benefit of making a "To Do" list in which I prioritized tasks that had to be accomplished during the day. In addition, I also wrote a weekly and monthly list which helped me with the timeline involved in this project. At first, the daily list was difficult to follow. I allowed various occurances to interfere with my schedule. I realized I couldn't continue in this fashion and as I became more disciplined, everything began to fall into place. For the most part, I use time more effeciently and effectively today. The changes I have made over the last three years and during the duration of this project have helped me become a more effective educational leader. There is, however, more room for improvement. My planning and organizing strength lie in my ability to effectively schedule classes, events, activities, meet deadlines, and thoroughly complete assignments.

Management Control

I am presently an administrator of two elementary schools

and without the assistance of a vice-principal. I taught for 18 years at Olivet School and was actively involved in the teacher's association. When I accepted the position as vice principal, I did not know what kind of cooperation I could expect. I was also concerned about how I would react if my authority was challenged. Years later, as principal, I have made many changes and have eliminated many requirements which I felt were unnecessary and time consuming for teachers. Procedures and guidelines have been developed collaboratively and are in place. They govern all activities and their responsibilities. There is effective communication among teachers, grade levels, parents, organizations, and the other schools in the district. Timelines for all reports, requests, minutes of meetings, and all other correspondence are in effect and are followed at all times. Through these procedures I feel I have excellent control over and awareness of what is occuring in both schools.

Written Communication Skills

Writing has been a labored chore for me for many years. Although my skills have improved with help and practice, there is still room for additional improvement. The amount of written correspondence throughout the duration of this project was great. Focusing written communication on the intended audience allowed me to be specific and eliminate extraneous

information and educational jargon. I have purchased a microcassette tape player and recorder which allows me to verbalize what it is I want to put into writing. This practice has allows me to hear what I am writing and determine if the messages are clear, concise, and persuasive, if necessary.

Creativity

Creativity is defined as the ability to come up with imaginative solutions in management situations. To me, creativity has come to mean a state of constant experimentation with new ideas, procedures, and methods. During this project, I have encouraged my staff to be creative in their teaching and to evaluate the results. To facilitate this, I removed the accountability aspect and recognized their willingness to try something different. I believe the teachers responded to new challenges because they knew I would appreciate their efforts and would support them regardless of the outcome.

In my administrative capacity I use my creative abilities in various ways and especially in dealing with scheduling conflicts and articulation problems. It has become important for me to constantly try new ways of improving a good situation.

Problem Analysis

This leadership dimension involved the ability to pick

out critical information, to seek data, and to weigh alternatives and consequences. Throughout this project as each situation presented itself it was analyzed to determine what needed to be accomplished and a timeline was developed. Early in my administrative career I often solved problems for others and consequently took on needless responsibilities. Today, I delegate what is appropriate. My strength lies in understanding implications involved in problem situations and weighing alternatives and consequences before I respond. Where situations were more compelling and required immediate action, responses have been effective for dealing with the situation.

As mentioned earlier, I am personally and professionally commited to my own growth and development. I am aware of my achievements and the effects of my performance as an educational leader and constantly strive to become more effective.