

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parental Attitudes towards Mainstreaming and
Involvement in Education: A Survey of Parents in
Trinidad and Tobago.

LESLIE HELEN MAXWELL-JOSEPH

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Manitoba
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION:
A SURVEY OF PARENTS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

BY

LESLIE HELEN MAXWELL-JOSEPH

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The attitudes of 40 parents in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago towards the integration of special needs students in public schools are reported in this study. This descriptive study also focused on the willingness of parents to become active participants in the mainstreaming process. Most parents supported the idea of mainstreaming special needs students and expressed a willingness to join parental involvement programs. The research findings may prove to be valuable to all those involved in the improvement of programming for special needs students in Trinidad and Tobago. This study may also be significant if it is used as a reference tool when future policies are developed with reference to parental involvement in Trinidad and Tobago.

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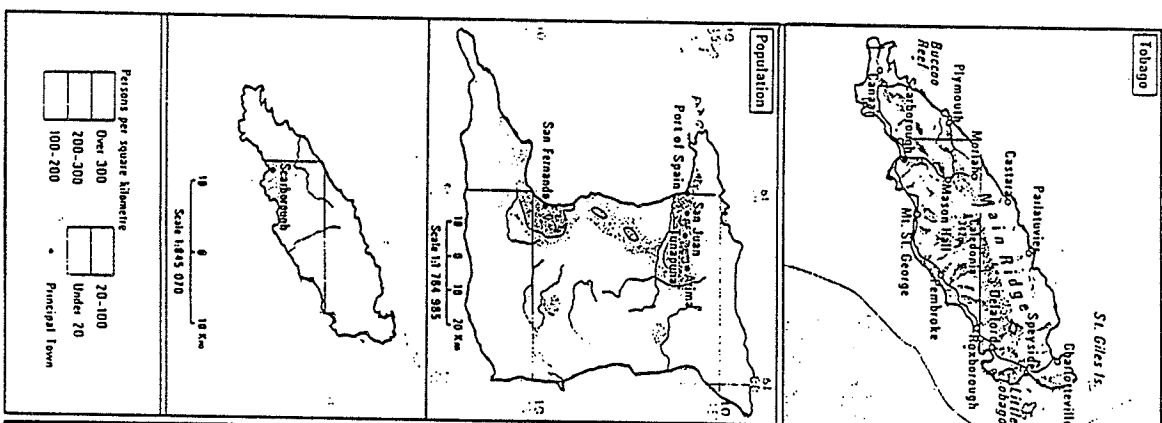
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INTRODUCTION

In recent times, educators have begun to recognize parents as equal and valuable partners in the education of children. Such a partnership can be an important factor in children's academic successes. Parents can assist children in more effective learning by complementing and reinforcing the work of the school. In fact, many children may not reach their full potential unless there is co-operation between home and school. As Walberg (1984) has noted, the most effective schools are those in which everyone works together to achieve clear and specific goals.

With the advent of the thrust to mainstream special needs students, parents have become less likely to be excluded from the decision-making process related to their children's education: often, they are very much a part of the educational team. Parents have recognized their responsibilities and the majority want to be involved in their children's education (Karnes and Esry, 1981). This fact is very evident in Canada and

in other economically developed countries (Freeze, Bravi and Rampaul, 1989).

Similar changes in the education of special needs children are taking place in Trinidad and Tobago as a result of the University of Manitoba - Trinidad and Tobago Special Education Project, 1987-1990 (Freeze and Rampaul, 1989). Educators and parents are beginning to re-examine their roles in education. This descriptive study, which is qualitative in nature, will focus, on parental attitudes towards mainstreaming special needs students in Trinidad and Tobago, and their willingness to become active participants in parental involvement programs.

Reasons for Research

This study was conducted as part of a three-year (1987 - 1990) collaborative effort funded by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the University of Manitoba to improve special education in Trinidad and Tobago (Rampaul, 1987).

The purposes of this study were to determine:

1. The attitudes of parents in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago towards the mainstreaming of special needs children.
2. Whether parents of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago were willing to become actively involved in parental involvement programs.

Educational Significance

The study may enhance our understanding of (a) parental attitudes towards mainstreaming special needs students in Trinidad and Tobago, and may determine (b) the nature and degree of parents' willingness to become active participants in parental involvement programs. In addition, the study may provide information which will be useful for establishing government policy and setting up effective programming for special needs children and their parents in mainstream classrooms.

Research Questions

In keeping with the descriptive nature of this study, there were no experimental hypotheses. Rather, research questions concerning parental attitudes

towards mainstreaming and parents' willingness or resistance to become actively involved in parental involvement programs were used to structure the study. The research questions were based on notions and concepts discussed in the literature review. A questionnaire was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Should special needs children be educated in public schools or in special schools?
2. To what extent should special needs children be integrated into the public school system?
3. Would the parents of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago be willing to participate in parental involvement programs?

Rationale for the Study

Since the passage of the Education of all Handicapped Children's Act by the American Congress in 1975 (PL 94 - 142), many parents in the United States, Canada, and Trinidad and Tobago, have become more and more vocal in expressing their views with regard to parental rights (Freeze, Bravi and Rampaul, 1989).

With Public Law PL 94 -142, parent participation in decision-making about their children was assured. It is interesting to note that the Legislature recently passed a law in Manitoba which gives parents the right to see any information on their children which is kept in school or school board files (Public School Act, 1990). This legislation allows parents to be part of the decision-making process regarding their children's education. This process has far reaching implications for educators, who must now begin to restructure educational programs for special needs children so as to include parental involvement.

This study, which was undertaken to ascertain parents' attitudes to mainstreaming special needs children, is certainly appropriate in light of the proposed changes which are being undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago to integrate special needs children.

A steadily growing mass of both anecdotal and research evidence shows that segregated or separate programs frequently do not work well for special needs students. Wang and Birch (1984) have stated that it is

feasible and desirable for most special needs students to be educated with other children and that there are benefits to be derived by both.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the literature is that, with the advent of mainstreaming, parental involvement is necessary. In the past, parents often were not regarded as useful contributors to the educational process, sometimes to the extent of being considered part of their children's problems, and their participation was largely restricted to beyond the classroom (Leyser and Cole, 1984). Currently, more extensive parental input into the daily activities of school is viewed as essential (Kelly, 1973; Paul and Warnock, 1980; Reynolds and Birch, 1977). This change in parental role expectations is especially pronounced in the field of special education. The research base supports the idea that there is a significant impact on children's academic and social skills (D'Alonza, 1982; Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman and Maxwell, 1978) that result from parental behaviour.

Educators recognize the impact of parent groups'

successes in lobbying for changes in special education service delivery (Cartwright, Cartwright & Ward, 1981). The parents of special needs children have been among the most active and insistent of all parents, usually stressing both access and quality in school programs (Abramson, Williams, Yoshida & Hagerty, 1983).

In light of the foregoing findings, the researcher embarked on an investigation to determine whether the parents of Trinidad and Tobago view mainstreaming of special needs children as something that is desirable and feasible. This is particularly important in view of the changes that are taking place with regard to educating special needs children in Trinidad and Tobago at the present time.

This study can be justified both on practical and theoretical grounds. In practice, it will be useful to the development of the Trinidad and Tobago Special Education Project; especially with respect to the improvement of current procedures and policies for formulating and implementing new programs for the inclusion of special needs children in the regular

school system. In theory, the study will be of interest to educators by helping them to assimilate and to understand parents' attitudes with regard to mainstreaming special needs children.

Definition of Terms

Mainstreaming may be defined as the placement of handicapped and non-handicapped children in the same educational setting (Yesseldyke & Algozzine, 1982).

Active Parental Involvement Programs may be defined as programs in which parents play an active role in the decision-making process with respect to teacher co-ordinated school programs. They may also play an active role as support personnel with respect to the teacher.

Special Needs Students may be defined as students who have sensory or physical disabilities (Lewis and Doorlag, 1983).

Handicapped Students may be defined as students who have special learning needs due to mental, physical, sensory, language or emotional disabilities (Lewis and Doorlag, 1983).

Slow Learners may be defined as students who experience difficulty in most academic subjects and are characterized as having a slower rate of learning. In this study, the terms participants, subjects and respondents are used interchangeably.

Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into four parts. Chapter One contains the introduction, the reasons for the research, the educational significance of the study, the research questions, a rationale for the study, and a section defining specific terms. The organization of the thesis is also explained in Chapter One.

A review of the related literature is presented in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three is a discussion of the methodology, instrumentation, data collection procedures and data collection techniques used.

Chapter Four contains a summary of the findings and a discussion of the results. Conclusions and recommendations for future research are also included in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Perspectives on Mainstreaming and Parental Involvement

In recent years, the mainstreaming of special needs students has gained prominence. The regular classroom placement of special needs students evolved after researchers confirmed that mildly handicapped children did not appreciably benefit from placement in self-contained special education classes (Dunn, 1968; Johnson, 1962).

In contrast to the literature review on parental involvement, which included twenty studies relating to this topic, there were few empirical studies dealing with parental attitudes towards mainstreaming.

After reviewing the literature, it became evident that while there is much research regarding the opinion of school administrators on mainstreaming (cf. Gickling and Theobald, 1975; Harasymiw and Horne, 1976; Moore and Fine, 1978; Shotat, Iano and McGettigan, 1972), there is a scarcity of literature on parental attitudes

towards mainstreaming. The majority of the literature consists of parents' anecdotal experiences in their attempts at obtaining a mainstream education for their handicapped children. Some of the parents have reported positive effects (cf. Burke, 1978; Kean, 1975; Pukeh, 1972), while others have expressed negative viewpoints (Hayes and Gunn, 1988; Moore & Fine, 1978).

Overall, the willingness of parents to support mainstreaming has focused on parents of learning disabled children whose preference for mainstreaming was dependent upon the availability of special needs supports. In terms of lack of support for mainstreaming, parents who have not had much experience with special needs supports have been reluctant to support mainstreaming proposals (Mlynek, Hannah & Hamlin, 1982). According to these researchers, these parents had previously worked hard to obtain special needs services in special schools for their mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed children, and may have been reluctant to support a new educational placement.

One useful empirical investigation into parents' attitudes towards mainstreaming, was reported by Mlynek, Hannah, and Hamlin (1982). In this study, conducted in the mid-western United States, 330 parents of the learning disabled, mentally retarded and emotionally impaired children were randomly selected from a mailing list to determine their attitudes towards mainstreaming. The results indicated that parental attitudes towards mainstreaming varied according to the degree of the handicap displayed by their children. Parents of learning disabled children were more supportive of the educational practice of mainstreaming than were parents of those children who were emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded. These researchers indicated that 63.5 percent of the parents of the learning disabled, 0 percent of the parents of the mentally retarded, and 21.9 percent of the parents of the emotionally disturbed supported mainstreaming. The researchers stated that this difference in reaction may be attributed to the fact that the parents of the learning disabled had more experience with

mainstreaming programs and felt more comfortable supporting this practice.

In another study reported by Abramson, William, Yoshida and Hagerty (1983), 60 parents of learning disabled children were surveyed to ascertain the following: (a) their relationship with school personnel, (b) their child's academic and social process, and (c) whether they thought integrated educational programs were having a beneficial effect on their children. The parents, in this sample, were taken from 2 sub-urban school districts in a major community in South Western United States. The results indicated that when parents were more involved in their children's education, they perceived that teachers and principals were more receptive to their input, and confirmed that their children benefitted both academically and socially. In addition, parents showed a better understanding of their children's educational goals, placement, and social development.

Another study conducted in 1983, to determine parents' willingness to mainstream special needs

children was reported by Brantlinger (1987). In this study, personal interviews were conducted to ascertain information from 35 low-income parents in a Western United States city. The results of this study were very positive, as parents were supportive of full-time mainstreaming. These parents indicated that their support of mainstreaming was based upon the implementation of mainstreaming supports.

Recognizing the fact that the most effective schools are those in which everyone works together for clear specific goals, educators have embarked upon projects to improve special education support services (Walberg, 1984). These include providing more in-service training to teachers and sensitizing parents to the whole mainstreaming process. The Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago is also aware of changes which have to be made in education to accommodate students with learning difficulties. This fact is more evident in light of the 1984 report of a study by the Organization of American States. This study revealed that 16% (or 27,182) of the 169,886

children enrolled in government and assisted schools, and another 24% (or 40,773) were low achieving children experiencing difficulties (Marge, 1984).

In 1984, the Trinidad and Tobago Government, having committed itself to improving education, began to undertake more practical and more realistic upgrading programs to assist low achieving children who were experiencing learning difficulties. This opportunity was made possible by the 1987 - 1990 Trinidad and Tobago-University of Manitoba Special Education Project (Rampaul, 1987). The University of Manitoba provided the personnel, instructors, and expertise for the training of teachers in the assessment and programming of students with special needs. The main objectives of this project were to assist educators in Trinidad and Tobago to become sensitized to the characteristics of special needs children, and to enable them to acquire skills with respect to modifying instructions and providing differentiated curriculum in the regular classroom. To this effect, 21 teachers were selected from a number of

Trinidad and Tobago nationals. These trained teachers, called co-tutors, became an important part of this project, as they were required to use their leadership skills in delivering follow-up workshops in curriculum-based assessment and programming throughout Trinidad & Tobago (Rampaul, 1989).

The need for parental involvement was recognized, as the success of mainstreaming depended upon the co-operation of all participants who have a vested interest in the school system. As Paul, Turnbull and Cruickshank (1977) have stated: students, parents, and the community are vital elements of the school's total social context, and educators should share with them the responsibility for planning, implementing, and monitoring mainstreaming.

Parents, especially, are vital members of the school's social context. Parents know their children better than teachers and other educational personnel (Paul et al, 1977), and it is beneficial to include them in special education programs.

In 1987, the Trinidad and Tobago Government, recognizing the need for parental support, and the

benefits to be derived from parental involvement in education, embarked upon a public awareness campaign to sensitize the public to the needs of special needs children. This was done by means of television, radio, and featured newspaper articles (Rampaul, 1989).

To date, several of the programs proposed by the director of the Special Education Trinidad and Tobago Project, have been implemented. The co-tutors are very involved in the Project and are continuing to assist in the delivery of the special education support services. The success of the workshops delivered in Trinidad and Tobago, over the past three years, is evident by the comments of some of the co-tutors.

The following comments were voiced by some of the co-tutors after the May, 1990 workshop (Rampaul, 1990: Appendix A).

" Practicising mainstreaming will help both the student and the teacher."

" Sometimes, it is necessary to stream for a period of time (of varying duration) and then mainstream."

" I've enlisted the help of some parents who are willing to help to remedy concerns regarding their children."

School Supervisor Murray (1990), recognizing the importance of the special educational programs, reaffirmed his confidence in the project. He stated that the success of mainstreaming in Trinidad and Tobago would require supports in the implementation of various programs.

Parents: A Valuable Resource

Several rationales support parental involvement. Some of the major reasons stem from the idea that education is seen as a parental responsibility (Karnes & Esry, 1981; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1978). Compelling evidence supports the idea that a warm, nurturing and stimulating environment should be provided in early childhood (White, 1977). The need for this nurturance is especially important as parents establish a bond between themselves and their children. This can be done in several ways; for example, parents can informally teach pre-school children about reading and

writing (Anderson, Heibert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985). As children approach the age for formal schooling, parents may choose the schools that they want their children to attend. Parents also are responsible for sending their children to school. Their genuine interest, or the lack of it, in their children's learning of values about education and its relative worth, profoundly affect their children's attitude towards the educational process (Abramson, Williams, Yoshida & Hagerty, 1983). This statement is a very profound one and reinforces the importance of parents' responsibilities in their children's education.

Educators perceive parental involvement as a necessary feature of special education programming (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Henderson, 1988; Ost, 1988). Several teachers who were interviewed in a study by Becker and Epstein (1982) indicated that their job of teaching could not be accomplished without programs that involved parents. This is definitely an affirmation of the notion that teachers rely on parents for support and help. This collaborative effort means

that teachers must share responsibility with parents, as they begin to work with them to try to fulfill their shared goals and aspirations for children.

Researchers have presented evidence of specific parental involvement programs undertaken in schools (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Fehrmann, Keith & Reimers, 1987; Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, 1982). These programs have proven to be so successful that some educators consider parents to be indispensable partners in the education of young children (Criscuolo, 1982). Parents have been utilized as tutors to assist students who were experiencing difficulty in language arts, especially in the area of reading. Criscuolo (1982) stated that this reading program involving parents as tutors, was piloted in 12 schools during the 1979-80 school year, and it proved to be very successful at the K-8 grade levels.

Over the past two decades, researchers conducting several studies involving parents in education have been almost unanimous in their conclusions: parental involvement is associated with greater academic student

achievement (Epstein, 1984; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Henderson, 1988; Lamm 1986; Tizard, Schofield & Hewison, 1982; Walberg, Bole & Waxman, 1980). Against this backdrop of research, individual schools and school districts in Canada and in the United States are increasing their efforts to involve parents in the academic process. For many years, parents have contributed their time and effort in fund-raising activities and have served as active participants on advisory councils and school boards. Realizing the success to be derived from the above ventures, educators are exploring creative ways of involving parents directly in the teaching-learning process.

Twenty studies from 1972 to 1988 relating specifically to parental involvement were identified through a survey of the literature. These studies were mostly undertaken in the United States. Twelve studies focused on the importance of parental involvement to successful student achievement. Although the studies stressed the importance of parental involvement in student achievement, many variables such as age, sex,

and socio-economic status have to be taken into consideration when analyzing the results. Karnes & Esry (1981) acknowledge that special educators today can no longer excuse themselves from working with parents and that it is evident that schools must take the necessary steps to promote more active parental involvement. These two researchers even specify that schools should provide in-service training for their staff and make budgetary arrangements to incorporate parental involvement programs.

Educators can attribute special educators' increased interest in working effectively with parents of handicapped children to three related factors: (a) parental involvement has become a right; (b) educators have recognized that their effectiveness as teachers has increased with parental assistance and support; and (c) many parents want to be involved in their children's education. As Hewison (1982) confirms: most parents are not only capable and willing to assist, but they are also effective helpers of their children. When parents show an interest in their

children's education and support teachers in helping to maintain high standards and expectations for their children, they are promoting attitudes that are critical to student achievement. Henderson (1988) confirmed from her research on parental involvement, that parental involvement, (whether based at home or at school or begun before or after a child starts school) has significant and long lasting effects.

While the term 'parental involvement' is used to encompass a broad spectrum of activities, one common theme that permeates the literature is that they all seek to bring together in some way the separate domains of home and school. The rationale for developing this contract may range from the desire to involve parents in the decision-making process with regard to programming for their children, to that of passing on to them strategies for dealing more effectively with their own children.

Educators are beginning to recognize the impact of parental groups' successes in lobbying for changes in education. As a result of parent advocacy groups, The

Education for all Handicapped Children's Act (Public Law 94-142) was passed by the United States Congress in 1975. This landmark legislation requires the States to provide a free, appropriate public education to all handicapped children, in an environment that is the least restrictive as possible. Similar legislation has been enacted in many Canadian provinces; providing for appropriate placements for all handicapped children.

Public Law 94-142 mandates parental involvement as a guaranteed right, rather than as a privilege (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1978). Parents must, therefore, be invited to be a part of the multidisciplinary team in developing their children's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

The rationale for this type of parental involvement in shared decision-making is in systematically planning for appropriate student learning outcomes. As Wiegerink, Posante-Loro & Bristol (1978) have suggested, parental involvement would not only assist parents indirectly by providing emotional and informational support for them, but would

also provide opportunities for parents to participate in management decisions within specified projects.

The importance of continued parental involvement is further supported by Bronfenbrenner (1974) following a study of the effects of early intervention programs. Bronfenbrenner describes a study called the Supplementary Kindergarten Intervention Program known as SKIP. This program, done in 1969 - 1970, involved two components. One was a Piagetian curriculum emphasizing cognitive development. The second component entailed "intense parental involvement" in the educative process. This phase of the program was implemented by a "home counsellor" who, in a series of visits, planned activities with the mother which paralleled those being carried out by the child at school. At all times, effort was made to have the mother see herself as a resource person capable of helping her child to learn.

This study involved 36 Kindergartens who were matched on sex, race and the Binet IQ Test. These students were divided into three groups of 12. They

were also found to be roughly comparable in number of children in the family (between four and five) and age of mother (early thirties). Group one received the full program. These students attended a supplementary SKIP class four half-days per week when the regular Kindergarten was not in session; in addition, their mothers received bi-weekly visits from a counsellor. Group two attended SKIP classes but their mothers were not visited. Group three, the control sample, was offered no program beyond their regular half-day Kindergarten class.

The largest gain in IQ (16 points) was made by the students in group one who had also been involved in a parental intervention program during their pre-school years. Students in group two showed a gain of 11 points, while the students in group three showed a gain of 10 points. In general, the findings of this study suggest that a parent education component is important if the child is to continue to benefit academically from a compensatory pre-school program as higher IQ scores predict later school success. This study

indicates that the involvement of parents as partners provides a transference from school to home which can reinforce the effects of the school's program while it is in operation, and held to sustain them after the program is no longer operational.

Educators' Attitude Toward Parental Involvement

Educators play a major role in promoting or in inhibiting the successful implementation of parental involvement programs. They set the tone for others to follow in terms of relating to the needs of parents and children.

Teachers, for instance, have always held mixed views with regard to parental involvement. Epstein & Becker (1982) conducted a survey to ascertain how elementary school teachers felt about parental involvement in home learning as a teaching strategy. The survey which was done in the Spring of 1980 involved 37,000 public elementary school teachers in over 600 schools in the state of Maryland. About 28 percent were first-grade teachers, 30 percent were

third-grade teachers, 29 percent were fifth-grade teachers, and 13 percent were either reading or math specialists. Over 90 percent of the respondents reported that they communicated to parents by sending notices home, by the use of the telephone, and by interacting with the parents on open-school nights. The teachers clearly supported this standard interactions with parents. Most of the teachers felt that this type of contact helped to support the work initiated at the school level. The teachers' comments revealed their contrasting opinions on the benefits expected from parent assistance at home. Some teachers were very positive about parent involvement; others have been discouraged by their attempts to communicate and to work with parents.

To work effectively with parents, educators must be prepared to formulate plans, and to conduct training sessions for parents (Karnes & Zehrbach, 1972). Parents, in turn, should be prepared to devote some time on a regular basis to the program so that the results could be measured for its effectiveness within a specified time frame.

Educators should also be aware that the schools exist as a family support, rather than the family existing to support the school. They should, therefore, try to work with the parents and to support their efforts to become productively involved with the school, even though the parental involvement might be very minimal (Karnes & Zehrbach, 1972). When the home and school put forward a co-operative effort, we can expect the home and school to have the maximum effect on learning success, student achievement, and school involvement.

Methods of Parental Involvement

Parents can be participants in parental involvement programs in both formal and informal ways. Formal involvement occurs when parents function as paraprofessionals in response to an entire school division's planned parental activities program. Informal involvements are generally confined to parental activities in their own children's classrooms in response to an individual teacher's or school's invitation.

Many schools encourage parent volunteers who assist teachers in and out of classroom settings. Parent volunteers receive pre-service and ongoing in-service training intended to help them gain skills to use at home as well as in the schools.

Classroom activities performed by the volunteers include tutoring pupils, assisting teachers in making charts and games, checking papers, and assisting in reading centres. Parent volunteers may also carry out certain specific activities in a home setting.

Becker & Epstein (1982), who conducted a research on practical uses by teachers for involving parents, have listed five groups of activities that may involve parents in a home setting. These five groups of activities are as follows:

- (a) techniques that involve reading and the use of books,
- (b) techniques that encourage discussion between parent and child,
- (c) techniques that specify certain informal activities in a home setting to stimulate learning.

- (d) mutual contacts between teacher and parents that specify a particular role for parents in connection with their children's school lessons or activities, and
- (e) techniques that develop parents' tutoring, helping or evaluating skills (p.90).

Each of the five groups of techniques merit some consideration to see how applicable they are in a home setting and to discuss the benefits that may be derived from following such activities.

Most parents provide books and print material for their children. Some parents enjoy reading to or listening to their children's oral reading. Here interest in books and in oral reading is being stimulated. Informal parent-child interaction could be developed through the following methods:

- (a) having the child read the ingredients for a recipe as the parent prepares same,
- (b) allowing the child to follow the instructions for the building of various home projects, and

- (c) word game quizzes, such as naming objects in the kitchen that begin with a certain letter of the alphabet.

In all these activities oral language is being fostered and developed.

Mutual contracts between students, teachers and parents could help to shape the behaviour of the child. An example of such a contrast could be, "John will learn his ten spelling words before he watches television."

Finally, the questioning and evaluating technique could lend itself to higher levels of thinking skills, as children are taught to look for specific information before beginning to read a comprehension passage. This particular technique should only be suggested to parents who have the aptitude and interest in such an activity.

One area of importance which should not be overlooked in setting up parental involvement programs is the fact that all parents will not be able to participate in all the activities or be committed to

programs in the home. It is also very important that parents receive the necessary training to conduct any form of parental involvement activity. In addition, providing feedback to the parents as to how effectively they are working with their children is also important as parents need the assurance that what they are doing really makes a difference.

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Research results verify that everyone benefits when parents are involved in their children's education. Henderson (1988) confirmed that some of the major benefits of parental involvement programs include better test scores, improved grades, better longterm academic achievement, positive attitudes and behaviour, more successful programs, and more effective schools. Several kinds of parental involvement including home tutoring, providing feedback and correction on student homework, monitoring and supporting student skills at home, parent-student discussion periods concerning homework, and parent assisted learning within the school setting are supported in the research. For

example, Henderson (1988) and Iverson, Brownlee & Walberg (1981) support such findings (Appendix D). Regardless of the form the parent supported instruction might take, achievement increases were noted in nearly all cases. Students exceeded their previous performance in academic subjects and outperformed 'control students' whose parents were not involved in instructing them. This is evidenced by researchers Iverson et al, (1981).

The effect of parental involvement on elementary students' reading achievement is well documented. Epstein (1984) described a study on the effect of teacher practices of parental involvement on student achievement. She confirmed that there were gains in the area of reading. This longitudinal study involved 293 Grades three and five students in Baltimore, Maryland, who took the California Achievement Test in the Fall and Spring of the 1980 - 1981 school year. When the results were analyzed, there was a clear indication that students whose teachers were leaders in the use of parental involvement programs made greater

gains in reading achievement than did other students whose teachers did not employ parental involvement activities. In determining the validity and reliability of the results, certain variables, for example students' homework practices and the students' initial (Fall) scores were taken into consideration.

Iverson, Brownlee and Walberg (1981) reported on a study conducted to determine the effects of teacher-parent contacts on the reading achievement of 398 underachievers in Grades four through eight. The students were mostly from economically disadvantaged homes who were reading one to two years below Grade Level. The effects of the gains made by the students were measured using the California Achievement Test which was administered first in October and then in May of the same year. In this study, the independent variables that were considered were grade, race, sex and number of parent-school contacts. Parental contacts resulted in gains in the reading performance of the younger students, whereas they had a diminishing effect in the performance of the older students.

In general, the literature reveals a positive relationship between parental involvement and student gains, although the nature of the involvement significantly influences its impact on student achievement. A good example of parental influence and student achievement is cited in a report by Fehrmann, Keith and Reimers (1987) which documented that parental involvement has an important direct positive effect on high school grades. This study incorporated parental participation, with the parents being called upon to exercise their influence of controlling students' television viewing time, so that the students could dedicate more time to their homework assignments.

The long term benefits of this longitudinal study involving 28,051 high school students seniors drawn from 1,016 high schools in the United States showed that when parents helped high school students to focus on their school work and homework assignments, there was a positive effect on student grades. In other words, building a strong learning environment at home included holding high expectations of success and

encouraging students to have positive attitudes towards education. This in turn, powerfully affects student achievement. Henderson (1988) concludes : children whose parents keep in close contact with the school, obtain scores which are higher than children of similar aptitudes and family background whose parents are not involved in similar situations. Parents who assist their children in the learning experience at home nurture in them attitudes that are crucial to student achievement.

In summary, the research takes the whole movement for parental involvement into a new and welcome dimension. Research conclusions support the concept of parental involvement. In addition, researchers provide additional input on the perceptions of parents regarding mainstreaming special needs students. It seems evident that with the advent of mainstreaming, resources are needed to implement new programs. Educators are beginning to be aware that parents are a valuable resource in the implementation of programs for special needs students.

The support for mainstreaming and the interest in parental involvement is clear, strong and specific from both parents and school personnel. The results of the literature review are informative in explaining the positive effects of parental involvement, as well as recognizing the nature of resistance to mainstreaming. In addition, the review of the literature has helped to pinpoint directions for future research and practices with respect to students with special needs.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Research Design

A survey questionnaire (Appendix A) was employed to collect descriptive information about (a) parental attitudes towards mainstreaming special needs students in the public school system of Trinidad and Tobago, and (b) to determine the nature of parental involvement in the education of their children. In keeping with the descriptive nature of this study, there were no experimental hypotheses. This researcher relied upon qualitative information supplied by the subjects in the sample to generate their perceptions of mainstreaming special needs children (Gay, 1987).

Population and Sample

Subjects were selected using a multi-step procedure. The co-tutors who were selected to be teacher trainees in the Special Education Project in Trinidad and Tobago provided the researcher with a list of names of 100 parents with children attending

public schools from different geographic areas in Trinidad and Tobago. From this list of names, 40 parents were selected by the researcher. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure that both sexes, as well as parents of various socio-economic backgrounds and geographic locales had fair chances of being represented in the sample.

Instrumentation

To collect the data needed to answer the research questions in this study, a survey instrument (Appendix A) was constructed. This Parent Survey Questionnaire, which was made up of 14 items, as well as demographic or descriptive information (Appendix C) was intended to:

- a) assess parental attitudes towards mainstreaming, and
- b) ascertain whether parent respondents would be willing to participate in parental involvement programs.

The 14 questions included multiple response and dichotomous (yes/no) items. Space was provided for comments.

Expert View

To establish face and content validity of the research instrument used for this study, (Gay, 1987), the instrument was appraised by a two member panel of experts from the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba. This panel reviewed the questionnaire in terms of content, structure, and length, and made suggestions with respect to the deletion of extraneous items.

Data Collection Procedures

In July 1989, the researcher conducted face to face interviews with 40 parents of children attending public schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Ten (10) were from north Trinidad, ten (10) from central Trinidad, ten (10) from south Trinidad and ten (10) from Tobago. Since the study involved personal interviews, confidentiality and concern for the respondents' welfare and integrity were given uttermost consideration. To this effect, the participants were assured of confidentiality (Appendix B).

The researcher used structured interviews and

parents were asked the same questions on the questionnaire. The decision to employ structured interviews for the collection of data, was to enhance the gathering of material that is specific, and based upon parents' responses to the same questions. In a structured interview, the interviewer asks precise questions from a prepared questionnaire. The interviewer has virtually no freedom to do anything except nod and make neutral noises. He/She is, in fact, a reader and a recorder of a questionnaire. Interviews took place between the hours of 5:00 to 7:00 on weekdays and 9:00 to 12:00 on Saturdays. The interviews took place in the homes of the subjects. Interviews lasted from 15 to 20 minutes. The interviewer posed questions to the participants and recorded their responses.

Data Collection Techniques

Bearing in mind the research goals, the researcher adopted the following strategy:

1. Survey parents of children attending public schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

2. Obtain information from parents to determine their willingness to participate in parental involvement programs in Trinidad and Tobago.
3. Describe the general responses of parents of Trinidad and Tobago.
4. Prepare a comparative analysis of parents' responses to set questions in the questionnaire.

Limitations of the Research

Although interviews are a popular method for data collection in descriptive studies, they have some issues which cannot be controlled by the researcher. There were at least five limitations recognized by the researcher:

1. The desire to please the researcher on the part of the respondents. This might have occurred if the parents felt that their positive responses would lead to improved services for special needs children.
2. The method of selection. Even though the researcher used stratified random selection, it

must be borne in mind that the co-tutors supplied a list of names of parents to the researcher. There is, therefore, a possibility that these parents were knowledgeable about the Project and would provide positive responses with regard to improved services for special needs children.

3. The previous knowledge which the respondents brought to the interview as a result of public awareness campaigns done by the organizers of the Trinidad and Tobago Project. Any knowledge of the benefits of mainstreaming and of parental involvement which the respondents were aware of could have influenced their responses with regard to the questionnaire presented.
4. The generalization of the results. The results can be generalized only to other parents with children attending public schools in Trinidad and Tobago, and not to parents who do not have children within the public school system.

Parents who do not have children within the school system may not be as committed as parents who have to advocate for their children.

5. The interpretation of the questionnaire. Even though the researcher constructed a questionnaire which was piloted by 3 parents for any form of ambiguity, it is possible that the participants interpreted the questionnaire differently and this would have produced differences with regard to responses given.

Delimitations of the Research

The sample (N=40) selected, obtained by stratified sampling, was meant to ensure that both sexes as well as parents of different geographic areas, different age-groups, different incomes and different professions were represented in the sample. However, the sample may not be representative of Trinidad and Tobago parents over-all due to the method of parents being nominated for inclusion and the small sample size of the study.

Reliability

Reliability is concerned with whether or not the same results will emerge if two or more researchers conduct the same study and whether or not the results of the measurement are true (Kerlinger, 1973). The survey questionnaire might well be criticized in terms of reliability. The questions were devised solely for the study without reference to a standardized model. There may have been ambiguity with respect to the wording of the questionnaire. To help counteract threats to the validity of the questionnaire, it was critiqued by a 2 member team of experts from the University of Manitoba.

Although these criticisms are warranted, there is a reasonable likelihood that the data obtained from the questionnaire present a clear indicator of how the participants feel about mainstreaming and parental involvement.

Validity

Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Borg, 1987).

To establish validity, the questionnaire was piloted by 3 parents who were also co-tutors in the Trinidad and Tobago Project before it was administered to the 40 participants in the sample. They found the questionnaire readable and unambiguous. They felt parents would respond positively to the questionnaire. In addition, the term "mainstreaming" was defined on the questionnaire to enhance content validity.

Assumptions

According to Gay (1981), "an assumption is any important fact presumed to be true, but not actually verified" (p.71).

In light of this definition, the researcher made the following assumptions:

- (a) Description of the data obtained from the respondents are absolutely free from the researcher's bias.
- (b) The study provides knowledge which may be of value and interest for future studies dealing with other aspects of special education in Trinidad and Tobago.

- (c) The knowledge and findings derived from this study could be applicable for helping to formulate educational policies in Trinidad and Tobago, in particular, and possibly in other developing countries.
- (d) The knowledge and findings obtained in this study could be replicated by another researcher, using the same data and information this researcher utilized in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction of the Results

The results of the study are presented in four sections:

First, the demographic information about the respondents is reported.

Second, general information on the number of parents with children attending public schools, as well as the age groups of the children, the children's attitudes towards certain school subjects, the ability of the children in terms of average, above average, and below average ability, whether the children were receiving remedial help, and the reasons for receiving such help is reported.

Third, parents' responses with respect to their knowledge of mainstreaming, whether it was operational in the schools their children attended, and whether mainstreaming would be helpful to their children are included in this section.

Fourth, parents' responses with regard to their

willingness to be participants in parental involvement programs are also reported.

Fifth, attitude scores on specific questions are reported to determine parents' attitudes towards mainstreaming special needs children in the public schools of Trinidad and Tobago.

Frequency counts were used to determine parents' attitudes, and their preference for placement of (a) slow learners, (b) the slightly handicapped, and (c) the severely handicapped in a public school setting.

Responses to the questions on mainstreaming of special needs children were considered in light of the variables, (a) age group, (b) income, (c) geographic area, and (d) occupation. The researcher examined the responses given by the male and female respondents to determine if gender was a factor in the particular choices given for mainstreaming the different levels of students, namely, the slow learners, the slightly handicapped and the severely handicapped. The parents' responses were fairly consistent and illustrative of their support for mainstreaming special needs children.

Gender was not a determining factor in the particular choices given by the respondents.

Report of the Results

Tables 1-4 show the demographic information obtained from the 40 parents in the study. The total male and female subjects were, more or less evenly distributed: N=40 (19 Male; 21 Female). There were exceptions in the following groups where the sample sizes were small: (a) the 20 - 29 age group (n=3), (b) the 50 -59 age group (n=2), (c) the business sector (n=3) and, (d) the (\$TT) \$40,000 - \$60,000 income group (n=4).

Results of Questions Numbers 1 - 11 of the Questionnaire

All the 40 parents who were interviewed, in the sample, had children attending public schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Of the 40 parents, 13 had children in the 5-10 age group, 10 parents had children in the 11-16 age group, and 17 parents had children in both age groups.

The majority of the parents (34 out of 40)

reported that their children had positive attitudes toward school. Only 4 parents had children who had negative attitudes toward school, and 2 parents reported that their children were indifferent toward school.

The majority of the parents reported that their children had positive attitudes toward Reading, Math, and Physical Education. Thirty-three out of the 40 parents had children who had positive attitudes towards Reading, 6 parents had children who had negative attitudes towards Reading, and 1 parent said that his child was indifferent to this subject. Twenty-seven out of the 40 parents had children with positive attitudes towards Math, while 13 parents had children with negative attitudes. Thirty-two out of the 40 parents reported that their children had positive attitudes towards Physical Education, while 8 out of the 40 parents had children who had negative attitudes towards this subject.

Twenty-six out of the 40 parents reported that their children were of average ability. Seven parents

reported that their children were above average in ability, while another 7 parents reported that their children were below average in ability.

Twenty-seven out of the 40 parents reported that their children were either receiving remedial help, at the school level or home tutoring services, while 13 out of the 40 parents reported that their children were not receiving any form of remedial help. Four of the parents reported that their children were receiving help through tutoring services because they were above average in ability. Three parents stated that their children were receiving remedial help because they were below average in ability, while twenty parents reported that their children were receiving help because they were of average ability.

Of the 40 parents in the sample, 7 were familiar with the term mainstreaming, twenty-four were not familiar with the term mainstreaming, and 9 had a vague knowledge of the term mainstreaming.

Twenty-eight out of the 40 parents said that mainstreaming was not operational in the public schools

that their children attended. Seven parents said that it was operational in the public schools that their children attended, and 5 were undecided as to whether mainstreaming was operational in the public schools that their children attended.

An explanation of the term "mainstreaming" was provided on the questionnaire, and this may account for the positive response received regarding question No. 11. Thirty-four out of the 40 parents said that mainstreaming would be helpful to their children, while only 3 parents said that it would not be helpful, and 3 were undecided as to whether mainstreaming would be helpful or not.

Parents' Responses Regarding Parental Involvement

The data in Table 5 indicate that the parents in the four age groups were unanimous in their responses with regard to willingness to be participants in parental involvement programs.

The data in Table 6 indicate that the parents in the three income groups were unanimous in their responses with regard to willingness to be participants

in parental involvement programs.

The data in Table 7 indicate that the parents from the different geographic areas in Trinidad and Tobago were unanimous in their responses with regard to willingness to be participants in parental involvement programs.

The data in Table 8 indicate that parents with different occupations were unanimous in their responses with regard to willingness to be participants in parental involvement programs.

Placement Preference for Special Needs Students

Table 9 indicates that the majority of the male and female respondents in age groups 20 - 29; 30 - 39; and 40 - 49 years chose a regular class placement for slow learners. The male respondents in the 50 - 59 age group, were divided with respect to a decision for placement either in a regular classroom or in a regular classroom with a special teacher. Only 1 of the respondents indicated the need for special school placement for slow learners.

Table 10 indicates that the majority of the male

and female respondents in the various age groups selected a regular class placement with a special teacher for the slightly handicapped. Only 1 female out of the 8 in the 30-39 age group chose a special school placement.

Interestingly enough, there was a split decision among the 2 male respondents in the 50-59 age group, for either a regular class placement, or a regular class placement with a special teacher, for the slightly handicapped.

In Table 11, thirty-three of the respondents in the various age groups indicated a preference for regular class placement with a special teacher for the severely handicapped.

It is interesting to note that there was little preference for placement of the severely handicapped in special schools.

Table 12 indicates that the majority of the male and female respondents in the 3 income groups namely, the \$20,000, \$40,000 and the \$60,000, felt that slow learners should be placed in regular classrooms.

The data presented in Table 13 indicate that the majority of the male and female respondents preferred a regular class placement with a special teacher for the slightly handicapped. The only noticeable difference can be seen in the \$20,000 - \$40,000 income group, where 5 out of the thirteen female respondents selected a regular class placement for the slightly handicapped.

Table 14 indicates that the majority of the male and female respondents preferred a regular class placement with a special teacher for the severely handicapped.

There was very little support for placement of the severely handicapped in special schools. Only 7 male and female respondents made this selection.

Table 15 indicates that the majority of the male and female respondents from north, central, and south Trinidad and Tobago chose a regular class placement for slow learners.

On the other hand, respondents from north Trinidad, south Trinidad, and Tobago, as seen in Table 16, indicated a preference for placing the slightly

handicapped in a regular classroom with a special teacher.

With regard to the placement of the severely handicapped, the male and female respondents from north, central, south Trinidad, and Tobago, as seen in Table 17, indicated a clear preference for regular class placement with a special teacher, as opposed to placement in special schools. In the data presented in Table 18, there is a clear indication that the professionals, the business sector, the government employed, the self-employed and the home makers preferred a regular class placement for slow learners. In the business sector, however, there was a split decision (50-50) among the 2 male respondents for either a regular class placement or a regular class placement with a special teacher for slow learners. It is interesting to note that 1 out of the 5 female respondents who was self-employed selected a special school placement for slow learners.

Table 19 shows that the majority of the male and female respondents were in favour of a regular class

placement for the slightly handicapped. Among the self-employed, 1 out of the 5 female respondents selected a special school placement for the slightly handicapped.

Among the professionals, 4 out of the 7 male respondents selected a regular class placement for the slightly handicapped. There was a split decision among the homemakers for placement in either a regular classroom or in a regular classroom with a special teacher for placement of the slightly handicapped.

In Table 20, there is a clear indication that the majority of the male and female respondents among the professionals, the business sector, the government employees, the self-employed and the homemakers prefer a regular class placement with a special teacher for the severely handicapped as opposed to placement in special schools.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
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Table 1

Demographic Information

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>
20 - 29	3	1	2
30 - 39	15	7	8
40 - 49	20	9	11
50 - 59	2	2	0
<u>Total</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>21</u>

Table 2

Demographic Information

<u>Geographic Area</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>
North Trinidad	10	5	5
Central Trinidad	10	6	4
South Trinidad	10	5	5
Tobago	10	3	7
<u>Total</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>21</u>

Note: M = Male; F = Female

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
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Table 3

Demographic Information

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>
Professionals	12	7	5
Business	3	2	1
Gov't Employed	12	6	6
Self Employed	9	4	5
Homemakers	4	0	4
<u>Total</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>21</u>

Table 4

Demographic Information

<u>Income (\$TT)</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>
\$0 - \$20,000	12	4	8
\$20,000 - \$40,000	24	11	13
\$40,000 - \$60,000	4	4	0
<u>Total</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>21</u>

Note: M = Male; F = Female

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
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Table 5

Parent Responses re: Parental Involvement

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number</u>	
	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>
20 - 29	3	0
30 - 39	15	0
40 - 49	20	0
50 - 59	2	0
<u>Total</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>0</u>

Table 6

Parent Responses re: Parental Involvement

<u>Income (\$IT)</u>	<u>Number</u>	
	<u>For</u>	<u>Against</u>
0 - \$20,000	12	0
\$20,000 - \$40,000	24	0
\$40,000 - \$60,000	4	0
<u>Total</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>0</u>

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
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Table 7

Parent Responses re: Parental Involvement

Geographic Area	Number	
	For	Against
North Trinidad	10	0
Central Trinidad	10	0
South Trinidad	10	0
Tobago	10	0
Total	40	0

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
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Table 8

Parent Responses re: Parental Involvement

Occupation	Number	
	For	Against
Professionals	12	0
Business	3	0
Gov't. Employed	12	0
Self Employed	9	0
Home Makers	4	0
Total	40	0

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
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Table 9

Placement of Slow Learners

Placement		Age Group				
Preference	(G)	Total	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
Regular Class	(M)	16	1	5	9	1
	(F)	14	2	6	6	0
Regular Class	(M)	3	0	2	0	1
and a						
Spec. Teacher	(F)	6	0	1	5	0
Special School	(M)	0	0	0	0	0
	(F)	1	0	1	0	0
Total (M=19; F=21)		40	3	15	20	2

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
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Table 10

Placement of the Slightly Handicapped

Placement		Age Group				
Preference	(G)	Total	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
Regular Class	(M)	7	0	3	3	1
	(F)	7	2	4	1	0
Regular Class	(M)	12	1	4	6	1
and a						
Spec. Teacher	(F)	13	0	3	10	0
Special School	(M)	0	0	0	0	0
	(F)	1	0	1	0	0
Total (M=19; F=21)		40	3	15	20	2

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
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Table 11

Placement of the Severely Handicapped

Placement		Age Group				
Preference	(G)	Total	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
Regular Class	(M)	0	0	0	0	0
	(F)	0	0	0	0	0
Regular Class	(M)	17	1	5	9	2
and a						
Spec. Teacher	(F)	16	2	6	8	0
Special School	(M)	2	0	2	0	0
	(F)	5	0	2	3	0
Total (M=19; F=21)		40	3	15	20	2

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
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Table 12

Placement of Slow Learners

Placement		Income			
Preference	(G)	Total	0-\$20,000	\$20,000-40,000	\$40,000-60,000
Regular					
Class	(M)	16	3	10	3
	(F)	14	5	9	0
Regular					
Class	(M)	3	1	1	1
and a Spec.					
Teacher	(F)	6	2	4	0
Special	(M)	0	0	0	0
School	(F)	1	1	0	0
<hr/>					
Total (M=19; F=21)		40	12	24	4

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

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Table 13

Placement of the Slightly Handicapped

Placement		Income			
Preference	(G)	Total	0-\$20,000	\$20,000-\$40,000	\$40,000-\$60,000
Regular					
Class	(M)	7	1	4	2
	(F)	7	2	5	0
Regular					
Class	(M)	12	3	7	2
and a Spec.					
Teacher	(F)	13	5	8	0
Special					
School	(M)	0	0	0	0
	(F)	1	1	0	0
Total (M=19;F=21)					
		40	12	24	4

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

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Table 14

Placement of the Severely Handicapped

Placement		Income			
Preference	(G)	Total	0-\$20,000	\$20,000-\$40,000	\$40,000-\$60,000
Regular					
Class	(M)	0	0	0	0
	(F)	0	0	0	0
Regular					
Class	(M)	17	3	10	4
and a Spec.					
Teacher	(F)	16	6	10	0
Special					
School	(M)	2	1	1	0
	(F)	5	2	3	0
Total (M=19; F=21)					
		40	12	24	4

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

Table 15

Placement of Slow Learners

Placement	Geographic Area					
	(G)	Total	North	Central	South	Tobago
			T'dad	T'dad	T'dad	
Regular Class	(M)	16	4	6	4	2
	(F)	14	4	3	2	5
Regular Class	(M)	3	1	0	1	1
and a Spec.						
Teacher	(F)	6	1	1	2	2
Special School	(M)	0	0	0	0	0
	(F)	1	0	0	1	0
Total (M=19; F=21)		40	10	10	10	10

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

Table 16

Placement of the Slightly Handicapped

Placement	Geographic Area					
	(G)	Total	North	Central	South	Tobago
			T'dad	T'dad	T'dad	
Regular Class	(M)	7	1	3	2	1
	(F)	7	3	2	0	2
Regular Class	(M)	12	4	3	3	2
and a Spec.						
Teacher	(F)	13	2	2	4	5
Special School	(M)	0	0	0	0	0
	(F)	1	0	0	1	0
<hr/>						
Total (M=19;F=21)		40	10	10	10	10

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

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Table 17

Placement of the Severely Handicapped

Placement	Geographic Area					
	(G)	Total	North	Central	South	Tobago
			T'dad	T'dad	T'dad	
Regular Class	(M)	0	0	0	0	0
	(F)	0	0	0	0	0
Regular Class	(M)	17	3	6	5	3
and a Spec.						
Teacher	(F)	16	4	2	4	6
Special School	(M)	2	2	0	0	0
	(F)	5	1	2	1	1
<hr/>						
Total (M=19; F=21)		40	10	10	10	10

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

Table 18

Placement of Slow Learners

Placement	Occupation						
	(G)	Total	Prof.	Bus.	Gov't	Self	Home
Preference					Empl.	Empl.	Makers
Regular Class	(M)	16	6	1	6	3	0
	(F)	14	4	1	3	2	4
Regular Class	(M)	3	1	1	0	1	0
and a Spec.							
Teacher	(F)	6	1	0	3	2	0
Special School	(M)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	(F)	1	0	0	0	1	0
Total (M=19; F=21)		40	12	3	12	9	4

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

Table 19

Placement of the Slightly Handicapped

Placement Preference	Occupation						
	(G)	Total	Prof.	Bus.	Gov't Empl.	Self Empl.	Home Makers
Regular Class	(M)	7	4	1	1	1	0
	(F)	7	2	1	1	1	2
Regular Class and a Spec.	(M)	12	3	1	5	3	0
Teacher	(F)	13	3	0	5	3	2
Special School	(M)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	(F)	1	0	0	0	1	0
Total (M=19; F=21)		40	12	3	12	9	4

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

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Table 20

Placement of the Severely Handicapped

Placement	Occupation						
	(G)	Total	Prof.	Bus.	Gov't	Self	Home
Preference					Empl.	Empl.	Makers
Regular Class	(M)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	(F)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Regular Class	(M)	17	7	1	5	4	0
and a Spec.							
Teacher	(F)	16	5	1	4	2	4
Special School	(M)	2	0	1	1	0	0
	(F)	5	0	0	2	3	0
Total (M=19; F=21)		40	12	3	12	9	4

Note: M = Male; F = Female; G = Gender

Data Analysis and Findings

The data collected through the interviews, were analyzed and discussed in the presentation of the findings of the study. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) suggest:

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts ... and other materials that you accumulate to increase your understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others (p.145).

In view of the above perspectives, the formal analysis of the data collected for this study was carried out when the collection of all the information was completed. Specifically, an attempt was made to ascertain, in the analysis, how the participants perceived mainstreaming of special needs children in the public schools of Trinidad and Tobago.

The researcher analyzed the data collected for this study applying the descriptive analytical process (Gay, 1987). This analysis was justifiable for this

study because the variables involved in this study were measurement types of operational definitions, that is, the variables were non-manipulated by the researcher.

The results of the data were analyzed manually applying the frequency counting technique where necessary.

Discussion of the Results

The results were discussed in terms of the variables: (a) age group, (b) income, (c) geographic area, and (d) occupation. The discussion focused specifically on the research questions, namely: (1) What are the attitudes of parents of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago towards mainstreaming special needs children? and (2) Would the parents of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago be willing to become participants in parental involvement programs?

After comparing the responses supplied by the respondents, a conclusion was made, namely, that there were no significant differences between the four variables, mentioned earlier, with regard to the choices given by the respondents for the placement of

special needs children in the regular school system of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, the data presented suggested that the majority of the respondents feel that slow learners should be placed in a regular classroom, while the slightly handicapped and the severely handicapped should be placed in a regular classroom with a special teacher. In fact, in the context of the questions asked in the questionnaire with regard to mainstreaming special needs children, including the severely handicapped, few of the respondents recommended segregated programs in special schools. Instead, the majority made recommendations designed to increase and improve mainstreaming opportunities.

Overall, parents' responses to all questions dealing with mainstreaming were highly optimistic and presented a positive view of mainstreaming special needs children.

The parents, in the sample, desired what they thought best for their children. These parents were very aware of the Trinidad and Tobago Special Education

Project and of the proposed changes with respect to education of special needs children. If the parents' studies are typical, then the majority of parents with children in the public school system are committed in obtaining the best educational opportunities for their children. They also accept the necessity for programs to be implemented for the education of slow learners, the slightly handicapped, and the severely handicapped.

The findings of this study support the contention that parents have a positive expressed opinion with regard to programming for special needs children and that they should be an integral part of special education programs. In addition, this study supports the findings of Becker's and Epstein's previous studies in support of parental involvement and adds another dimension to the mainstreaming of special needs students.

This study which was proposed to provide an answer to whether parents of Trinidad and Tobago want to be involved in special education programs, and whether they think that special needs children should be

mainstreamed in the public schools of Trinidad and Tobago, did provide a positive response in those respects. Though the previous statement is perhaps obvious, its implications are many and varied. Probably the most important conclusion to be set forth is the notion that the parents of Trinidad and Tobago have expressed support, not only for parental involvement programs, but for mainstreaming special needs children in the regular school system of Trinidad and Tobago. Though further research is required, the consensus of opinion is in favour of mainstreaming, instead of segregating special needs children.

Implications for Research

The research implications of this study reflect past research and the current findings, (Epstein, 1984; Henderson, 1988). This study has supported and extended past research in the area of the advantages of involving parents in the educational system. In terms of past research, Henderson (1988) confirmed that some of the major benefits of parental involvement include better test scores, improved grades, better long-term

academic achievement, positive attitudes and behaviour, more successful programs, and more effective schools.

In terms of this study, parents of Trinidad and Tobago expressed a willingness to be participants in parental involvement programs. As such, the Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago should begin to provide support and opportunities for parents to become more active participants in the education of their children.

The results of this study also indicate that the parents are in favour of mainstreaming special needs children. Parents of Trinidad and Tobago feel that slow learners should be educated in a regular classroom, while the slightly handicapped and the severely handicapped should be educated in a regular classroom with a special teacher. Results of this study also indicate that more emphasis is needed on initiating and developing parental involvement programs.

Educating special needs students in the regular school system is only part of the solution to improving

the educational system in Trinidad and Tobago. It would be a challenge for administrators and educators to develop school programs that could include parents. Such programs would require an adequate amount of funding. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago must now begin to reflect on funding for educational programs. Specifically, they should consider what types of financial aid which will be required for funding such programs and over what period of time it should be extended. It is evident that various adjustments will have to be made in setting up of parental involvement programs. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago must begin to focus on creating a gateway for the mainstreaming of special needs students in the public schools of Trinidad and Tobago. One alternative suggestion is to consider a merger of the special and the regular public schools to facilitate the gradual integration of special needs students. Attention will also have to be focused on making the existing public schools accessible to the physically handicapped.

In short, the following recommendations should be considered:

1. Educators should be made aware that all children should be given equal opportunity in the school system.
2. Since parents are very positive, in their attitude, towards mainstreaming, they should be encouraged to assist in special educational programs.
3. It is imperative that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago provide the necessary supports for the successful integration of special needs students.
4. To succeed, the regular classroom teachers need special skills to assist slow learners, and students who are mainstreamed.
5. Special education resource teachers should be provided with expert skills so that they can work in a consultative - collaborative manner with the classroom teachers to program for the slightly and the severely handicapped.

6. For mainstreaming to be successful, administrators, educators, parents, and students should begin to work in a consultative - collaborative manner.
7. Educators, who traditionally have not been trained to work with parents, should be provided with the necessary training in pre-service programs to enable them to work with parents in parental involvement programs.
8. Educators should take a closer look at the parent partnership role in the education of special needs children, and they should begin to reflect on changes and alternatives necessary for the implementation of parental involvement programs.
9. A concerted effort needs to be made to prepare and train parents for the roles expected of them.

Alternatives for resolving these issues might include the following:

- (a) The establishment of a task force targeted to

develop guidelines for establishing and setting up the parameters and the activities for the new role of parents of special needs students in a variety of school settings, and in diverse types of communities,

- (b) The involvement of parents in the initial phase of the development of guidelines in order to have their ideas and their input on the feasibility and practicability of some suggestions,
- (c) The creation of ongoing parents' advisory boards and of open forums, for providing information, ideas, and monitoring the implementation of parent interactions in the schools,
- (d) The evaluation of parental involvement programs for the purpose of providing adjustments and improvements to such programs,
- (e) Embarking on public awareness campaigns for the purpose of educating the public on the

critical role of parents in the educational process,

- (f) In the public awareness campaigns, emphasis should be placed on the fact that the integration process would be a gradual one in order to allay fear that the integration of special needs students will be jeopardized if teachers and parents are inadequately prepared to meet the special needs of these students in an integrated setting,
- (g) Emphasizing the successes to be derived from integrating special needs students by highlighting the benefits that would be gained by the largest group of children with special needs, namely, the slow learners or low achievers, and
- (h) Providing an information and an awareness program to prepare teachers, students, and parents to accept the gradual integration of severely perceptually impaired and seriously mentally handicapped students in the regular school setting.

Suggestions for Future Research

In terms of research studies, the researcher recommends:

- (a) Future research on parental involvement should be carried out to formulate the conceptual framework for parental involvement programs, so that they can be workable in the context of the schools in Trinidad and Tobago.
- (b) Pilot projects should be carried out in several schools, at different grade levels, to determine the type of parental involvement programs which are appropriate for students in primary, elementary, and secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago.
- (c) A longitudinal study of parental involvement programs should be conducted to ascertain the success of these programs.
- (d) A national survey of parental involvement programs should be conducted to ascertain the success of these programs.

- (e) Studies similar to the one carried out by this researcher should be conducted in other developing countries, so that the governments of these countries could pool their resources together, and so benefit from each other's findings.

Conclusion

The provision of education for all handicapped children can have a profound impact on educators and parents. The potential exists for a co-operative effort, as well as an antagonistic one. This research paper explored the views of parents of Trinidad and Tobago towards mainstreaming and parental involvement.

Within the past decade, the perceived relationship between the home and school has undergone a major transformation. Whereas in the past, parents have not been regarded as useful contributors to the educational process, educators have now recognized that parental involvement is essential in programming for special needs children.

Parents, in turn, want what is best for their

children. The parents, in the sample, voiced positive views towards mainstreaming and expressed a desire to be part of the educational team. With attention to both their rights, responsibilities and the benefits to be derived from parental involvement, parents and school personnel can better provide the best possible educational experience for all special needs children and fulfill the promise of a true partnership.

However, it remains to be seen whether research and practice can be restructured to achieve the goal of an educational system which incorporates parents as partners for the benefits of all children with special needs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NOTE TO PARENTS

The Trinidad and Tobago Government, in conjunction with the Canadian Government, are presently embarking on a Project to assist educators in providing additional programs to help children with "special needs".

RELEVANT QUESTIONS

1. Do you have children attending public schools?

Yes _____ No _____

2. How old are they?

Ages _____

3. Does he/she have a positive attitude towards school?

Yes _____ No _____ Indifferent _____.

(Note:- he/she in quest. 3, refers to one child of a particular age group.)

4. (a) Does he/she like Reading?

Yes _____ No _____ Indifferent _____.

- (b) Does he/she like Math?

Yes _____ No _____ Indifferent _____.

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(c) Does he/she like Phy. Ed.?

Yes _____ No _____ Indifferent _____.

5. Is she/he an above average student _____, an average student _____, or a below average student _____?
6. Is he/she receiving remedial help (special help) in school _____, or outside of school (extra lessons - a tutor) _____?
7. Why is he/she being given remedial help? Is it because he/she is an above average student _____, an average student _____, or a below average student _____?
8. If a remedial program is introduced into the present school system, would you be prepared to assist in seeing that it is successfully conducted?
i.e. a) attend parent-teacher interviews _____,
b) assist in monitoring home programs _____,
(seeing that the child does the assigned work)
9. Are you familiar with the term "Mainstreaming"?
Yes _____ No _____ Vague knowledge _____.
(Give short explanation)

Mainstreaming refers to the inclusion of special students in the general educational process. In a mainstreaming program, special students in regular classes participate in instructional and social activities side by side with their classmates.

10. Do you know whether mainstreaming is operational in the school that your child attends?

Yes _____ No _____ Undecided _____.

11. Do you think that mainstreaming will help to cater for the needs of all students?

Yes _____ No _____ Undecided _____.

12. Do you think that 'slow learners' should be placed in:-

- a) a regular classroom _____?
- b) a regular classroom with a specialist teacher _____?
- c) a special school _____?

13. Do you think that 'slightly handicapped children' with 'normal ability' should be placed in:-

- a) a regular classroom _____ ?
- b) a regular classroom with a specialist teacher _____?
- c) a special school _____?

14. Do you think that 'severely handicapped children' with 'normal ability' should be placed in:-

- a) a regular classroom _____?
- b) a regular classroom with a specialist teacher _____?
- c) a special school ____?

Additional Information:- (optional) _____

APPENDIX B

Letter of Consent

April 28, 1989.

Dear Participant,

To help the University of Manitoba-Trinidad and Tobago Special Education Project (1987 - 1990) establish a definitive portrait of Parental Involvement in Trinidad and Tobago, you are invited to take a few minutes to answer the questions in this survey. The answers given by you shall be held in strict confidence.

Please be advised that you are free to withdraw at any time from participating in this survey. While there is an opportunity for you to fill in your name and address in order that the results of the survey be forwarded to you, you may, if you wish, remain anonymous.

If you have further questions about this study, please contact me or my student advisor at the address listed below.

Thank You.

Yours sincerely,

Leslie H. Joseph.
(Graduate Student)

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Dr. Richard Freeze.
(Student Advisor)
Faculty of Education, University of
Manitoba. Winnipeg, Manitoba. R3T 2N2.

APPENDIX C

Descriptive Information

SUBJECT NO.: _____

1. GENDER: MALE _____ FEMALE: _____

2. AGE-GROUP: 20-29 _____ 40-49 _____

30-39 _____ 50-59 _____

60+ _____

3. OCCUPATION:- _____ 4. INCOME:- _____

5. GEOGRAPHIC AREA:- North Trinidad _____

Central Trinidad _____

South Trinidad _____

Tobago _____

QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED DURING THE INTERVIEW.

The questions to be asked during the interview are so constructed as to avoid any issue that may be deemed political in nature or may serve to bring about confrontation with educators. The purpose of the questions is to get those interviewed thinking about schools and to elicit general feelings about public education. The questionnaire will also serve as a guide for future studies on parental involvement in the education process.

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APPENDIX D

SELECTED STUDIES RE: - PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

RESEARCHER	SURVEY OR STUDY	NATURE OF STUDY	INSTRUMENT USED	VARIABLES EXAMINED	LOCATION	RESULTS	LIMITATION
HENDERSON (1988)	SURVEY-1987 N A T . COMMITTEE CITIZENS IN EDUCATION. EXAMINED 18 STUDIES ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT- TO HELP TO INTEGRATE PARENTS INTO THE SCHOOL SYSTEM	NO SPECIFICS ON ANY ONE STUDY . (VARIATIONS OF STUDIES)	SURVEY	INCOME OF PARENT . LOCATION OF SCHOOLS . AMOUNT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	COLUMBIA. U.S.A.	WHEN PARENTS AND SCHOOLS W O R K TOGETHER. THERE WERE GREATER STUDENT GAINS; BETTER GRADES ; B E T T E R ATTITUDE	NO SPECIFIC DATA . FIGURES WERE GIVEN BY STUDENTS BEFORE OR AFTER SURVEY W A S CONDUCTED. QUESTION OF RELIABILITY OF RESULTS
EPSTEIN (1984)	S T U D Y - EXAMINED TEACHER PRACTICES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT	LONGITUDINAL STUDY-299 STUDENTS FROM GRADES 1 & 5	CALIFORNIA ACHIEVEMENT TEST (C.A.T.) PRE/POST TESTS FALL & SPRING 1980-1981	STUDENTS HOMEWORK PRACTICES. STUDENTS INITIAL 'FALL' SCORES	BALTIMORE. MARYLAND	STUDENTS W H O S E TEACHERS WERE LEADERS IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT GAINED IN READING ACHIEVEMENT- WHERE THERE W A S NO INVOLVEMENT- NO GAINS	STUDY IS LIMITED TO PARENTS WHO SHOW INTEREST IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
WALBERG, BOLE & WAXMAN (1980)	S T U D Y - PARENTING PROGRAM TO PROMOTE HOME CONDITIONS TO STIMULATE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT (PARENTS SUPERVISED SCHOOL WORK. P R A I S E D STUDENTS. - HELP STUDENTS TO DEVELOP SELF-ESTEEM AND ENCOURAGE READING	LONGITUDINAL STUDY OVER A ONE YEAR PERIOD-826 BLACK INNER CITY CHILDREN IN GR. 1-6 FROM 41 S C H O O L DISTRICTS	IOWA TESTS OF BASIC SKILLS (COMPREHENSION SECTION) PRE/POST TESTS -MAY 1975 AND MAY 1976	PRIOR READING COMPREHENSION SCORES ; PROGRAM INTENSITY USED BY TEACHERS RE:- P A R E N T INVOLVEMENT; POST TEST SCORES	C H I C A G O ECONOMICALLY DEPRIVED AREAS	1. GAINS-0.5 IN GRADE EQUIVALENT MORE THAN THE PREVIOUS YEAR IN PROGRAMS WITH LITTLE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT. 2. GAINS-1.1 IN G R . SCHOOL CAREER EQUIVALENT IN THE INNER CITY. OTHER PREVIOUS YEAR VARIABLES IN PROGRAMS WITH MORE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT	THE HIGH GAINS OF 1.1 IN G R . EQUIVALENT IN YEAR WOULD N O T BE SUSTAINED THROUGHOUT A C H I L D ' S SCHOOL CAREER IN THE INNER CITY. OTHER VARIABLES WILL HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED R E : - RELIABILITY OF TEST SCORES AND PERCEIVED GAIN
FEHRMAN, KEITH & REIMERS (1987)	STUDY-ACTIVE P A R E N T PARTICIPATION	LONGITUDINAL STUDY-LARGE SAMPLE-28,051 HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS FROM 1016 HIGH S C H O O L S - PARENT WERE CALLED UPON TO EXERCISE CONTROL OVER TV VIEWING (MORE TIME SPENT ON HOMEWORK)	V A R I O U S STANDARDIZED ACHIEVEMENT TESTS	E T H N I C GROUPS . GENDER . GRADES . P A R E N T PARTICIPATIO N. TV VIEWING	SCHOOLS IN SOUTHERN UNITED STATES	STUDENTS INCREASED TIME SPENT ON HOMEWORK. WHICH. IN TURN, HAD A POSITIVE EFFECT ON STUDENT GRADES	QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF MANY VARIABLES U S E D ANALYSES- RE:- QUALITY OF THREE MANIPULABLE VARIABLES- P A R E N T INVOLVEMENT HOMEWORK AND TV VIEWING. THESE ARE UNKNOWN. STUDENTS REPORTED ON THEIR TV VIEWING TIME
IVERSON, BROWNLEE & WALBERG (1981)	S T U D Y - EXAMINED EFFECTS OF TEACHER- P A R E N T CONTACTS RE:- READING ACHIEVEMENT	LONGITUDINAL STUDY (ONE SCHOOL YEAR) 388 GR.1-8 STUDENTS READING AT 1-2 YEARS BELOW GR. LEVEL- MOSTLY BLACK STUDENTS	CALIFORNIA ACHIEVEMENT TEST (C.A.T.) PRE/POST TESTS OCT. & MAY 1980-1981	GRADE. SEX. RACE. NO OF P A R E N T CONTACTS RE:- PHONE CALLS. VISITS, NOTES	DESEGREGATED SCHOOLS IN UNITED STATES	GAINS IN READING ACHIEVEMENT BY STUDENTS AT LOWER GRADE LEVELS	THIS STUDY DID NOT LOOK AT THE NEEDS OF T H E DIFFERENT LEARNERS (STUDENTS IN THE UPPER GRADE LEVELS RESENTED THE NO. OF PARENT CONTACTS AND RECEIVED NO BENEFITS. PEER PRESSURE W A S NOT EXAMINED