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# Let us now praise famous students: A qualitative study of high school students with learning disabilities

Judith Elizabeth Day

*University of New Hampshire, Durham*

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**University of New Hampshire, 1994**

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LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS STUDENTS:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH  
LEARNING DISABILITIES

BY

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B.A., University of New Hampshire, 1970  
M.Ed., University of Southern Maine, 1981

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

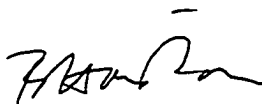
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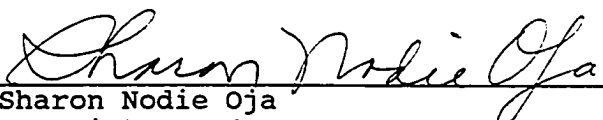
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April 26, 1994

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Date

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Larry, who has repeatedly reminded me that he has faith in me and told me over and over in my worst hours that I should be true to who I am. Thank you for listening; thank you for always caring in the face of it all. By the way, who is John Galt?



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Tommy and Beth: Tommy, you are all that a brother should be. How did I get so lucky? Thank you, Beth, for allowing him to be who he is.

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To Grant (G\_T): I used Rilke in the "Personal Statement" which I wrote as part of my application to the doctoral program. I will use Rilke again in this Acknowledgement. Then I wrote, "Perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave." You have worked with me for a long time now; you have seen my dragons, and helped me turn many of them into princesses. I will not forget the minutes and the hours which you have spent with me through the good times and the bad. I find this to be a difficult ending.

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ABSTRACT

LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS STUDENTS:  
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS  
WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

by

Judith E. Day  
University of New Hampshire, May 1994

This study used qualitative methodology in order to gain understanding of the school lives of high school students with learning disabilities in the areas of reading and writing. Two resource room sections of students were observed, using methods of participant observation over a year long period and four case studies of students from these sections were conducted. Classroom work of all students was studied and special education files of those chosen as case studies were reviewed. Students and school personnel involved in the education of the students were interviewed.

Research findings suggested that, despite years of intervention, high school students with learning disabilities in this study continued to have severe reading and writing difficulties. These difficulties pervaded their school lives, negatively impacting all academic areas, social interactions and personal development. Difficulties experienced by the students were exacerbated by issues involving ways in which their

differences marginalized them, language development, academic disengagement, problems seeing relationships between actions and consequences, and limited expectations for their present and future lives.

## PART I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Preface

This study is an account of my observations of two groups of high school students identified as learning disabled in the areas of reading and writing. I observed the students during two sections of a resource room they attended. My interest in studying these students evolved from my many years of employment as a resource room teacher, involved primarily with students identified as having this disability.

#### Theoretical Framework

I brought beliefs to this study that were based on literature in the field of learning disabilities, reading and writing and the broad topic of education. My experience and my readings in the field of learning disabilities (Epps, Ysseldike, & McCue, 1984; Weener, 1981; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 1990) led me to the belief that the term "learning disabled" refers to a heterogeneous group of students who vary widely in potential, ability and personal experiences and exposure. Consequently, I believe that in order to discuss these students, plan for them educationally, or predict their outcomes, they must

be looked at as individuals, rather than as a group. I think the causes of learning disabilities are primarily neurological. However, I do not think that this belief necessarily leads to a reductionist model that claims that the most important variables regarding failure are inherent in the child. While I believe that most students with learning disabilities do have weaknesses in cognitive processes which impact upon their learning, I also believe that other personal issues in their lives and their interactions with the educational environment are also important variables.

In Spreen's (1987) study of the adult lives of children who were identified as learning disabled, his data indicated that the greater the neurological involvement, the greater the negative impact upon the life of the student would be. In my experience, in terms of learning outcomes, this has been the case. However, it is my belief that other areas of the student's life also influence the prognosis for a life of quality. These include the support systems, most often the family, which are in place in the students lives, and the educational experiences of students.

Support systems in a student's life refer to many things. In the most basic of definitions, I think the term refers to systems which allow the primary needs for nurturance including food, clothing, shelter, and

emotional support to be met. In more subtle ways, I think that these systems often influence the expectations established for the students. These may include expectations for independence, for academic achievement, and for positive interpersonal relations. When these primary needs are not being met, I believe they interfere with students' abilities to learn, particularly students who have learning disabilities.

I brought to this study the belief, as discussed by Hartse and Mikuleky (1984), Ekwell and Shanker (1988) and Freire (1985) that reading and writing are abilities which are important in enabling students to function well in society, in most aspects of their school lives and in creating personal empowerment. Related to this is my belief that language ability and reading and writing ability are interrelated. I believe that some students do not bring language skills, most clearly defined for me by Gee (1992) as "primary discourse," to their beginning school years. Whether this is due to experiences in their preschool lives or cognitive weaknesses, they are put at a great disadvantage by these language difficulties.

I also brought to this study the belief that educational interactions can positively impact reading, writing and language difficulties. I do not believe that children learn simply by being exposed to materials. Wertsch (1984) discuss the fact that, in Vygotsky's

theories, there is a dictum that the Zone of Proximal Development is created by instruction. According to Wertsch this leads to the notion that "though it is possible to characterize an individual in terms of his or her potential to enter into a certain level of interpsychological functioning, this potential guarantees almost nothing about the level of interpsychological functioning that will actually come into existence in instructional interaction" (p. 12). This quote expressed, at least partly, my beliefs about the importance of the interactions between teacher and student in the classroom. These interactions seem to me to be even more crucial when students are having difficulty in school, as is the case with all students with learning disabilities. I brought to this study the belief that, even when important supports in a child's life are not present, and when neurological difficulties are somewhat severe, the right instructional interactions can make a difference in the academic achievement of students.

Finally, I brought to this study the belief that most teachers care about their students and are committed to helping them. I believe that they hope that the educational experiences of the students will allow them to lead more fulfilling lives. I believe that this applies regardless of the range of abilities and personalities of the students whom they teach.

These beliefs drove my decision to design a research study using a qualitative methodology. These beliefs also influenced my decision to do research which involved the use of participant observation and case studies. My belief in the importance of attending to individuality of students with learning disabilities when considering their educational needs led me to choose a type of research which would look at small numbers, rather than large groups, of students. I thought that this type of research would allow me to better define for the reader the characteristics of the students about whom I was reporting. My belief in the importance of the notion of the interactive nature of education, in the sense of a Zone of Proximal Development, led me to my decision to do research which took into account the context in which learning occurred.

It was my expectation that an integration of my conceptual and methodological frameworks would enable me to develop in a study which would be driven by the beliefs which I consider to be most crucial when attempting to understand students with learning disabilities. My decision to study high school students was the result of two factors. I wished to participate in an environment which was less familiar to me than other school grades to which I had been exposed in order to have less difficulty in making the familiar strange. I expected that this

strangeness would allow me to bring less bias to my research. I also chose high school because it is the last educational arena in which schooling is mandated. Therefore, I saw high school as an entry to the futures of students with learning disabilities and, consequently, an enormously important time in their education.

I entered this study with every hope that I could suspend theories and simply watch until I was ready to create my own. I entered this study with curiosity and hopeful expectation of watching learning occur. As the study progressed I began to realize that I was not only watching learning occur, but also watching lives evolve and futures begin to crystallize. This realization changed the nature of the study for me. It made me more invested. It made me less able to remain either emotionally or intellectually removed from the context. While I never became a "native," the evolution which I watched made it impossible for me to either suspend theories or feelings. When I began this study, I was not sure why I chose the title, "Let Us Now Praise Famous Students." As the study progressed, I had little doubt of the appropriateness of my choice.

I think it is important for me to acknowledge that I brought to the writing of this dissertation a recognition of what I will call the interactive nature of researcher and research which has an effect upon data collection and



data reporting. This belief is best summed up by Newkirk (1992) in the following passage.

Certainly in qualitative research, the observer is selecting and editing all of the time. Even those researchers who claim to account for the context must disregard or decline to report most of what they record. So the issue is not who strips and who doesn't strip, but how each strips to create accounts, narratives that gain the assent of readers. This issue is not which is more Real, but how each creates, through selection and ordering of detail, an illusion or version of Reality. The issue is not one primarily of methodology and objectivity, but of authoring and the cultural values embedded in various narrative plots.

This position will, no doubt, seem a dangerous one for a case study researcher to take. After all, the consistent warning in the educational research textbooks is that researchers should not turn into storytellers, introducing cultural and personal bias into their work. A more honest strategy--for both quantitative and qualitative researchers--is to admit, from the beginning, that we are all story tellers.

This recognition has been with me throughout the writing of this dissertation and while I do not wish to indicate that this dissertation is a story in the sense of a fictional account, I do wish to acknowledge that there has been a constant negotiation with the text of this study which has required a selection and ordering of detail.

As I stated in the previous paragraphs, I considered a qualitative methodology most appropriate for this study. In designing this study using qualitative methods, I planned to attempt to understand the social phenomena of the school world of high school students with learning

disabilities from both my perspective as a participant observer and from the perspective of the students. My goal was to be able to some degree to experience reality as the students experience it. By observing the students within the context of their school worlds, I hoped to gain knowledge of the importance of the interrelationship of the school setting and the students' lives. In studying the students within the context of the high school, I believed that it was important that I interact in the most unobtrusive way possible.

I entered this study attempting to see things as though I was seeing them for the first time and to suspend my beliefs and predispositions. I found this increasingly difficult as my research evolved and I became more caught up in the school lives of these students. It was my expectation that through the use of qualitative methods including participant observation, broad guiding questions, and open-ended interview techniques, I would be able to come to understand the perspectives of the students and those working with them to be expressed in a manner which would most reflect their reality.

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984), the research design in qualitative research remains flexible both before and throughout the actual research. Researchers do not know what questions to ask or how to ask them until they enter the field. They caution researchers "not to

hold too tightly to any theoretical interest, but to explore phenomena as they emerge during observation." They consider that "all settings are intrinsically interesting and raise important theoretical questions" (p. 17). In my research, I chose to use this methodological approach in the belief that it would create the greatest possibility for understanding the school world of high school students with learning disabilities.

When Lillian Hellman (1973) wrote a book of portraits she called it Pentimento. In her introduction she explained the meaning of the word.

Old paint on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens it is possible, in some pictures, to see the original lines: a tree will show through a woman's dress, child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea. That is called pentimento because the painter "repented," changed his mind. Perhaps it would be as well to say that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing and then seeing again.

That is all I mean about the people in this book. The paint has aged now and I wanted to see what was there for me once, what is there for me now.

This study, as Hellman describes her portraits, involved a considerable changing of conceptions. In this study I felt that I had seen and then seen again many times. Old pictures showed through new and new pictures redefined the old. I invite you to view with me these pictures and portraits of high school students with learning disabilities and take from this study pictures which have been redefined by your own viewing.

## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND

#### Purpose and Significance

This was a qualitative study of high school students with learning disabilities. I conducted this study using qualitative methods in order to attempt to understand what the school world was like for a selected group of high school students who were identified by their school system as having a learning disability.

This study is an attempt to gain some understanding of the personal and educational issues which face high school students with learning disabilities, especially those students who have difficulties in the areas of reading and writing. It was my expectation that this knowledge would add an important dimension to that information which had already been acquired about this population.

Learning disabilities is one of the handicapping conditions which is recognized by Public Law 94-142. This law was enacted in order to allow equal access to education for all students. It followed on the heels of legislation focused on an individual's right to a free, appropriate public education, particularly reflected in

the spirit of the famous school desegregation case Brown vs. the Board of Education (1954). Public Law 94-142 (adopted in 1977) was not only a law which was to allow access, but was also a law which was compensatory in nature. The spirit of this law reflects the American dream of education as a means to and possibility of success for all.

As in the case of the Civil Rights Amendment and school desegregation laws, results have been far less than satisfactory. Access to the American dream for many students identified as learning disabled seems to be as non-existent as it was before the law was enacted. The problem tears at the heart of our American definition of ourselves which sees equality of opportunity as a part of the fabric of our historical foundations and which somehow believes that success will result from such equality.

The label, "Learning Disabilities," brings with it many problems regarding interpretation and use. These problems in turn cause problems in the assessment, treatment and placement of those with this disability. Research into the outcomes of students identified as learning disabled indicated problems which affect many areas of their lives and persist into adulthood (Spreen, 1987). Although this was not true in all cases (Bruck, 1985), many students with learning disabilities had difficulties in academic, vocational or life skills which

continue into adulthood (Horn, O'Donnell, & Vitulano, 1983). These problems are of concern to a society, which by virtue of its historical statements and contemporary legislative commitments, places value on educational success. They are of concern to school personnel who work hard in order to see that students are successful in our schools. They are of concern to educational policy makers who must decide on ways to promote school success and ways to allocate funds which will help this to happen.

In 1968 George Spache of the University of Florida, a prominent figure in the field of reading, presented a satirical paper at the National Reading Association convention outlining some of the problems of the field of reading in a humorous manner. In this paper, using a tongue in cheek manner, Spache discussed the state of reading diagnosis and remediation in the year 1980. Spache began this paper by positing that by 1980, 50 percent of the general school population would be diagnosed as being dyslexic and that seven or eight major types of dyslexics would have been diagnosed. Among these were the Congenital Elexia, who would be treated by a program which stresses phonics and must be accompanied by Mrs. Smith's approach. He explained that he felt a cynical paper to be important in order to point out to leaders in the reading field that they must do some critical thinking if they were to continue to be

identified as leaders in the field and that as leaders they must express their opinions freely, for if this did not happen, the field of reading would be eclipsed by disciplines such as medicine and linguistics.

In fact, in 1994, although the field of reading has certainly not been eclipsed, other disciplines have been involved in the study of both reading and learning disabilities. Nevertheless, the contributions by these disciplines have not lessened the many difficulties which are inherent in the field, nor allowed that many of the controversies to be eliminated.

In Part I of this dissertation I will discuss literature in the fields of reading and learning disabilities which I found particularly germane to this study. The literature focuses on one meaning of literacy which I found particularly pertinent to this study and which I would like the reader to keep in mind when considering data collected in this study; the importance of literacy in society, in general, in the life of high school students, and in the life of an adult with reading and writing difficulties; the history of learning disabilities as a handicapping condition; theoretical issues and issues of assessment as well as identification issues related to learning disabilities; research difficulties in the field of learning disabilities; quantitative outcome literature regarding reading/learning

disabilities; and qualitative research in the field of learning disabilities. Finally, I discuss the purpose of this study.

In Part II of the dissertation I will discuss the study, focusing in particular on specific methods used in this study, the classroom, specific students (Case Studies), conclusions, and implications.

### Reading and Writing

The definition of reading and writing presented by Gee (1992) was found to be particularly appropriate for study. When reading and writing are discussed in this study, his definition will be kept in mind. When defining reading and writing, Gee begins by making a distinction between acquisition and learning of reading.

Acquisition is a process of acquiring something subconsciously by exposure to models and process of trial and error, without a process of formal teaching. It happens in natural settings which are meaningful and functional in the sense that the acquirer knows that he needs to acquire the thing he is exposed to in order to function and the acquirer, in fact, wants to so function. This is how most people come to control their first language.

Learning is a process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching, though not necessarily from someone officially designated a teacher. This teaching involves explanation and analysis; that is, breaking down the thing to be learned into its analytic parts. It inherently involves explanation and analysis; that is, breaking down the thing to be learned into its analytic parts. It inherently involves attaining, along with the matter being taught, some degree of meta-knowledge about the matter. (p. 23).



Gee states that reading is, at the very least, the ability to interpret print, that reading actually occurs within many discourses and that the notion of 'reading class' encapsulates "the common sense notion of literacy as the ability to read and write (intransitively), a notion that is nowhere near as coherent as it first sounds" (p. 24).

According to Gee, all humans receive one form of discourse, free, through acquisition. This discourse is our socio-culturally determined way of using language and occurs through communication with intimates. Gee describes this mode as the birthright of every human being which comes through ordinary socialization with the family. He defines this discourse as the "primary discourse."

Beyond this are other discourses that involve social institutions. These institutions require people to communicate with non-intimates. In these institutions secondary discourses are understood. Secondary discourses extend the use of language we acquired through our primary discourse. Secondary discourses involve uses of language, either written or oral, that go beyond our primary discourse. Gee considers telling your mother you love her to be an example of primary discourse, while telling your teacher you don't have your homework done is an example of secondary discourse.

Finally, he defines reading and writing as "control of secondary uses of language" (p. 25). Gee believes that for most people mastery of any discourse requires acquisition, not learning. He comments on what he calls "practical connections" to these ideas of literacy.

He explains that mainstream middle class children often look like they are learning reading and writing (of sorts) in school. But, in fact, he believes much research shows they are acquiring these abilities through experiences in the home both before and during school, as well as by opportunities school gives them to practice what they are acquiring.

Children from non-mainstream homes, he feels, often don't have the opportunity to acquire these primary discourses. Therefore, when they come to school, they cannot practice what they don't have and are consequently learning rather than acquiring.

The demands of society and consequently of schools have made the ability to read and write of increasing importance. As Rex Brown (1991) notes:

The new literacy that requires such massive change goes beyond mere reading and writing ability, beyond the so-called basics, and beyond the current requirements for a high school diploma. It now includes capacities once demanded only of a privileged, college-bound elite: to think critically and creatively, solve problems, exercise throughout the lifetime. What at the beginning of the twentieth century was a high standard for a few has apparently become, in the minds of a good many powerful people, desideratum for all (Brown, 1991, p. xii).

Hartse and Mikuleky (1984) also discuss the importance of literacy in our society. They state:

In retrospect it seems only logical that a new society which began in search of religious freedom--one rooted in the belief that everyone had the right to read his or her own Bible (though not interpret it too freely) should have and continues to have a fetish about reading. Geoffry Numbert, in reflecting upon the American Scene, writes: "Since the nineteenth century, Americans have believed that three R's are the guardian trinity of democracy and have regarded universal literacy as a precondition for social order..." What was and continues to be behind the classroom for universal literacy is a belief in the spiritual and psychological advantages that literacy is supposed to bestow. Francis Bacon wrote, "Writing maketh an exact man." (p. 47)

They go on to point out the importance and power of literacy by using the following statistical information which relates to the ways in which society's demands have increased throughout this century. For example, in 1910 only eight percent of 17 and 18 year olds graduated from high school. By the 1960s the United States Office of Education had raised the level of acceptable literacy to eight years of schooling. Today, 90% of occupations call for some reading and writing.

To emphasize the importance of literacy, the authors also cite Diehl and Mikuleky's examination of 100 occupations in which reading materials averaged the 11th grade level.

Hartse and Mikuleky discuss the importance of literacy in occupations. Mikuleky found that 15% of high

school juniors had difficulty comprehending a ninth grade level newspaper passage. Only one fifth of employed workers had the same difficulty, suggesting that persons experiencing reading difficulties may have difficulty obtaining gainful employment. The authors state that reading is no longer just the grasp of basic skills, but the "expansion of human potential in varying social contexts" (p. 73).

Ekwel and Shanker, in their book which deals with diagnosis and remediation of the disabled reader (1988), also emphasized the importance of being able to read. Besides employment difficulties often incurred by disabled readers, they also point out the probable effects on self-esteem. They explain that poor readers often fear they will be "found out" by others.

We have reason to be concerned about individuals who because of reading difficulties are unable to benefit freely from life in our society. An alarming percentage of people who do not succeed in our society--individuals who are unemployed, on welfare, or incarcerated--cannot read. And illiterates who do manage to earn a living have to live with low self-esteem and constant fear that their inability to read will be discovered by others. (Ekwel & Shanker, 1988, p. 4)

Paulo Freire speaks with particular eloquence and forcefulness about the power of reading and writing. He discusses the power of both the ability to read and the ability to use language in speaking and writing. Freire frequently uses the words of his students to express the

importance of being able to have command of language in reading, writing and speaking.

One worker stated: "Before agrarian reform we didn't need letters. First because we didn't used to think" (Freire, 1985, p. 12). Another stated: "I see now there isn't any questions. [about being able to use language] Suppose all human beings were dead, but there were still trees, birds, animals, rivers, the sea, the mountains-- would this be a world? 'No,' he answered emphatically. Someone who could say, 'This is the world' would be missing" (1985, p. 16).

Freire points out that learning to read and write is a human act which implies reflection in action (1985, p. 50). Codification allows mediation between concrete and theoretical contexts of reality. Through codification individuals may represent a dimension of reality and then step back from it in order to analyze it (pp. 51-52). Knowing the standard language allows students engage the wider society in dialogue and use this dialogue in order to change it (1990, p. 93).

Freire believes that literacy begets freedom. Although he is not an American and has worked in many other countries other than America, he feels that Americans often do not acknowledge the extent of illiteracy or the crippling effects which it has. He emphatically remarks: "Sixty million functional

illiterates in America represents a failure of something" (1990, p. 94).

### Jane

The importance of literacy is underlined in the following story about Jane, an adult with reading and writing difficulties. In my past, when I thought of the importance of reading and writing, I usually thought of most students as being literate by the time they completed school. Therefore, though I had given the subject some cursory thought, it did not stand out as a real problem in my mind. Around the same time that I began the research for this paper, I had the opportunity to assess Jane, a 34 year old woman who was attempting to further her education. When Jane explained to me what learning to read and write meant to her, she changed forever my view of the necessity of reading and writing.

As a child Jane's family life had been difficult. Consequently, she had missed much school due to family moves and changed schools often. She stated that although she knew she was unable to read, she would often sit quietly in class and consequently no one would question her ability. According to Jane, she told her teachers that she couldn't read, but when they didn't acknowledge her, she simply learned to continue to sit quietly in the back of the class.

She told me that I would be surprised at the good jobs she had held. Her description of her ability to hold these jobs was a description of a life in which she spent considerable time hiding her reading and writing problems. She said that she knew she was personable and fairly well spoken and could remember very well things that were shown to her. Therefore, whenever she was asked to read, she would also ask for a demonstration. This game worked well although it was stressful and required constant vigilance. When her son was born, everything changed.

Because her son was born with serious (though not life-threatening) medical problems, she was given pamphlets to read explaining what life style would be best for his condition, as well as medicines and a schedule of administration of medication to follow. She became very frightened when she realized that she could not read the labels on the medicines. She described the pamphlets as totally incomprehensible to her. Finally, in panic, she explained her dilemma to the pediatrician. He gave her films to watch on her son's condition and assured her that she was not stupid. She said that that was the first time in her life she felt that maybe she wasn't stupid and could stop hiding her reading deficiencies from the world even for a few moments.

When I met Jane, her son's medical condition had improved. Administration of his medicine was no longer a

problem and she understood his condition. However, as she told me, "I want to be able to read to and with him while he is in school. I want him to have a good life. I already have this year's Christmas planned for the two of us."

Part of that future hinged on her success in the remedial education program in which she was enrolled. She said that having a limited reading ability was causing her much physical illness which her doctor attributed to the stress she experienced in the face of stress which was the result of the academic demands made upon her. She finally, again, told her teachers that she was unable to read, but she said that in many cases they did not believe her because she was so well spoken in class and had such good ideas. She said that they thought she was just trying to get her homework assignments reduced.

The game of hiding appeared to be on the verge of starting again, but this time she was aware that she could not pull it off, and more importantly, she did not want to. Consequently, Jane asked again for help and help began with my assessment and then an added support in reading from her school. Probably Jane's future now holds more promise.



### History of Learning Disabilities as a Handicapping Code

A precursor to the establishment of Public Law 94-142 which dealt with the educational rights of children with handicapping conditions was Brown vs. the Board of Education (the first desegregation case) which established the doctrine of equal educational opportunity. Following this case, other cases which dealt with the reasonable opportunities to learn for children with handicapping conditions were litigated.

A part of Public Law 94-142 deals with LRA (Least Restrictive Alternative), a special education doctrine derived from a constitutionally-based doctrine of the least restrictive alternative. The doctrine states that if legislative actions broadly stifle personal liberties, they may not be pursued, even though the legislative purpose of the action is legitimate. This aspect of the law reflects the complexity of a law which labels and categorizes in order to protect rights.

Although there are dangers inherent in assessment and classification, they can help to create educational opportunities for students with disabilities, define and/or explain problems, and measure the results of educational services. However, classification can also be "a political tool which regulates people, denies them opportunities by labeling them as 'undesirable' or in the

case of minority persons, forcing dominant cultural values on them.

... The label 'handicapped' or 'disabled' may have the effect of underscoring the differences between 'them' (the handicapped) and 'us' (the non-handicapped). It may create not only a dual system of services, but also a dual system of law--law for 'them' and law for 'us.' (Turnbull, 1990, p. 84)

Learning disabilities is the most prevalent handicapping condition. In the United States, states use different criteria to identify learning disabilities; for this reason the percentage of students in each state with this handicapping code varies. Percentages reported range from 2.4 to 9.5. Statistics comparing federal counts of students identified as learning disabled indicated that from the 1976-77 school year (the first year that counts were made) to the 1986-87 school year, there was a 142 percent increase in the number of students served. This increase is in sharp contrast to the slight increase in the overall number of students enrolled in special education during this time. Explanations for this increase are multiple. The 1983 National Association of State Directors of Special Education attributed the increase to (1) improved procedures for identifying students, (2) liberal eligibility criteria, (3) social acceptance/preference for the learning disabled classifications, (4) cutbacks in other programs and lack of general education alternatives for children who

experience problems in the regular classroom, and (5) court rulings. Another explanation may be that fewer students today are meeting the standards set for them in general education (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1990, pp. 121-122).

### Paradigms

The phenomenon of learning disabilities is a complex one. One possible reason for this complexity is explained by Torgeson (1986) in his discussion of theories and paradigms in the field. He expresses the idea that there are three paradigms from which most research and theory in the field of learning disabilities are derived. They are (1) neuropsychological paradigm, (2) the information processing paradigm, and (3) the behavior analysis paradigm.

The neuropsychological paradigm draws its understanding from intellectual behavior on the brain systems which support it. The information processing paradigm draws on the idea that learning disabilities could best be understood through knowledge of how children think; that is, the idea that mental accomplishments depend upon certain processing of mental processing operations. The applied behavior analysis paradigm derives its methodological foundations from the principles of operant conditioning described by B. F. Skinner. Those

following this paradigm function with the idea that learning failure is primarily the result of improper practice and inappropriate response to instructional stimuli.

These paradigms create a situation in the field of learning disabilities in which differences in belief lead to differences in assessment and instructional approaches. Torgeson expressed the belief that all three paradigms should be acknowledged as important and credible in continuing attempts to understand learning disabilities and in determining effective assessment and treatment. He warns, also, that because of the inexactness of the identification and placement of children with learning disabilities, research regarding this population may be confounded.

#### Definitions and Clarifications

Definitions and classifications of learning disabilities also cause difficulties in the field. The literature reveals that there are at least 11 different definitions used when discussing the term "learning disabled" (Hammill, 1990). Hammill has identified nine ways in which these definitions might differ. For example, underachievement may be determined by the presence of developmental imbalances and/or aptitude achievement differences. Learning disabilities has also

been defined in terms of the central nervous system, difficulties with psychological processing, spoken language difficulties, academic problems, problems involving thinking and reading, problems other than academic, language or conceptual disorders such as spatial orientation, the idea that learning disabilities can co-exist with other learning problems and, finally, the idea that learning disabilities exist throughout life spans.

In general when the term "learning disability" is used, two characteristics are highlighted: (1) a discrepancy between potential and achievement and (2) the absence of another handicapping condition. When individuals are described as having learning disabilities, it is generally assumed that they have difficulty in the way in which they process information and that this difficulty is neurologically based. The problem of demonstrating proof of a neurological disturbance has caused much controversy regarding the use of this label and the assessments employed in order to designate students as learning disabled.

It is important to note that, as is clear from the discussion of the heterogeneous nature of the students identified as learning disabled, and the fact that more than one definition has been developed, the use of the label, "learning disabled," has been fraught with controversy. While some claim that the learning disabled

are under identified in schools, others claim that there is over identification due to difficulty separating those who are learning disabled from those who are underachievers (Algozzine & Ysseldyke, 1986). There are several reasons for this controversy.

#### Reasons for Classification Difficulties

In general, decision making regarding the classification of students as learning disabled has been influenced by many factors. For example, research indicated that teachers hold different attitudes about children as a function of the children's sex, facial attractiveness and behavior (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1990). Ysseldyke and Algozzine (1990) conducted a study in which 224 school professionals volunteered to participate in a diagnostic computer simulation program developed specifically for the study. Each participant was asked to read a case folder description of a child. Participants were given various information about the child from a choice of seven categories such as intelligence and achievement. In the study the independent variables were sex, SES, type of problem, and appearance, while diagnostic classification decisions were considered as dependent variables. (Classification possibilities were "Learning Disabled," "Mentally Retarded," and "Emotionally Disturbed.") The tendency in this study was to find the

case study child to be learning disabled. However, the child was identified by the school as emotionally disturbed rather than learning disabled if there were written indications of behavior problems. The conclusion of the researchers was that although diagnostic decision makers should make data based decisions, in reality decisions are influenced by stereotypes engendered by referral information.

Epps, Ysseldyke and Mogue (1984) examine the manner in which school personnel were able to distinguish students with learning disabilities from slow learners. Subjects in this study were 65 school psychologists, 38 special education teachers, and 21 university students in programs related to special education or psychology (the naive group). Information regarding the chronological ages of 18 fourth graders was given to these subjects along with test scores in the domains of academic achievement, cognitive ability, perceptual-motor ability, self-concept, and behavior problems. Nine of the cases were students who had been identified by school districts as learning disabled and nine were students who were considered to be low achievers.

Results of this study indicated that all three groups of judges were in agreement with the schools' decisions about half of the time. No significant difference was found among the judgments of the three groups. The

authors of the study propose several reasons for the difficulty in using the materials presented to distinguish between students identified by schools as learning disabled and those identified as low achievers. First, they consider that it may be difficult to make judgments when multiple sources of evaluation materials are used because of the cognitive complexity of the task. Second, there is insufficient and inaccurate feedback about these judgments. Third, sometimes those making identifications fail to take into account technical adequacies of psychoeducational devices or the appropriate use of certain tests. The authors suggest that a simplification of the process might help to eliminate some of the problems of classification. They also suggest that placement might be better decided by observing the students' behavior. Finally, they state that the extreme heterogeneity of the population of students considered learning disabled may indicate that there is little hope that school personnel are able to accurately diagnose students with learning disabilities and, therefore, they even question the utility of such a category.

Weener (1981) also discusses difficulties which make research on this population confusing. He reviews 47 studies in which normal children were compared with children labeled as learning disabled. He points out that the amount of variability in the performance within the



group of students with learning disabilities was similar to that within the group of students selected from regular classrooms. He also points out that the overlap between the performance of the normal and learning disabled group is great. He therefore concludes that studies do not always provide an emphasis on either the variability within the groups or the degree of overlap between the groups.

An extensive study conducted by Shaywitz et al. (1990) also found reasons for identification difficulties in which they identified two groups of reading-disabled students in order to compare the prevalence of reading disability. The researchers identify one group through the use of a definition based on a discrepancy between predicated reading achievement (based on intellectual ability) and actual reading achievement. Those in the schools identified by other group. When groups were compared, results indicated that the prevalence of reading disability based on school identification was two to four times more common in boys than in girls. They concluded that their findings were consistent with those in the literature which indicate that factors not related to a discrepancy between a child's ability and achievement influence school identification and placement of students with disabilities. They considered excess levels of activity and behavior problems of boys to be reasons for

higher rates of learning disability for boys in school identifications.

### Research Issues in the Field of Learning Disabilities

Not only do issues abound in the field of learning disabilities regarding theory and identification, but also in ways in which outcomes may adequately be researched. I will now discuss some of these issues before discussing outcome literature in the field of learning disabilities in Chapter II.

Spache (1967), after an extensive review of literature, considers in some depth problems which arise when outcomes of short-term reading remediation are studied. These problems include the following: (1) there may be difficulty in measurement which results from differences in measurement tools (tests) which are used; (2) problems may exist in use of terms such as "normal" when growth is being measured; (3) there may be problems in deciding that gains made by students are the result of remediation, rather than gains which would have been made anyway, and (4) questions may remain unanswered regarding factors which were taken into account in terms of characteristics of students who were referred for remediation (such as IQ, socio-economic status, etc.). Spache concluded that given these difficulties justifications for remediation should be considered,

particularly in relation to expectation of positive, long-term effects.

Horn, O'Donnell and Vitulano (1983) also discuss methodological difficulties in research which may make conclusions about outcomes of those with learning difficulties difficult. These issues include the following: (1) Subjects may not be well defined; (2) Control groups may not be matched for factors such as socio-economic level, IQ, etc.; (3) Measurement instruments are inexact and inconsistent; (4) Constructs discussed such as "expected" normal growth are hypothetical; (5) Types of treatment are hard to define; (6) Categories which are being reviewed to determine success are not always differentiated. (For example, educational achievement may not be separated from socio-emotional adjustment; and (7) Compensatory strategies which have been employed by subjects, and which consequently have modified results, may not be taken into account.

Lieberman (1987) points out one particularly important aspect of subject selection in outcome research. He explains that outcome research relies to some degree on the participation of adults who must (in order to participate) define themselves as learning disabled. In some cases, those who have been able to become part of the adult world and lead successful and fulfilling lives, may

abhor any acknowledgement of their past or present disabilities, creating an embedded bias in terms of selection which is unique to studies involved with these adults.

#### Summary - Preface, Chapter I

In Part I of this study I began with a Preface orienting the reader to my reasons for and response to conducting this study. In this Preface, I explained that the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of personal and educational issues which face high school students with learning disabilities. My expectation was that a view of these students using qualitative methods and emphasizing the importance of the context of their school world would add an important dimension to the knowledge which has already been acquired about this population.

In Chapter I, I discussed the definition of literacy which I used when thinking about the reading and writing difficulties of the students in this study. I also discussed the importance of reading and writing in order to emphasize the significance of studying high school students who have made so little progress in the acquisition of these skills. Reading and writing were discussed in terms of the importance which they have particularly in contemporary society, their importance in

general to academic and personal attainment of individuals and their importance in the life of one adult whose story, I felt, reflected all of these dimensions.

The history of learning disabilities as a handicapping code and its relationship to litigation which was enacted in order to provide equal educational opportunity and access was also explained in this part of my paper. The explanation was followed by a consideration of paradigmatic assessment and identification issues which are related to learning disabilities. These issues were considered in order to explain some of the complexities that make the interpretation of the handicapping code one fraught with many controversies, all of which have an impact on research in the field. These included differing beliefs in education related to learning disabilities, problems with measurement when these students are identified as having a learning disability and educational services are determined.

Finally, in Chapter I, I introduced the topic of research in the field of learning disabilities and some of the issues and questions which contribute to the manner in which outcome literature in the field should be reviewed. In this portion of Chapter I, I presented an overview of questions raised by Spache after his extensive review of remediation literature. These questions resulted in his conclusion that it was difficult at best to determine

whether short-term reading remediation was effective and consequently the inference was made that there is cause to wonder about the justification for remediation as a means to create long-term, positive outcomes. I then presented some methodological issues which may create difficulties in learning disabilities outcome research as a preface to a review of that literature to be presented in the next chapter. These include difficulties in subject and control group selection, use of measurement instruments, use of hypothetical constructs such as "normal," problems in defining treatments, lack of categorical distinctions related to outcomes and lack of attention given to compensatory strategies which may be used and consequently modify learning disabilities, and embedded bias which may occur in outcome literature regarding learning disabilities because adults who are (or were identified as) learning disabled and who are successful in their adult lives may rarely become part of the pool of those selected as subjects of this research.

In Chapter II I review some of the outcome literature in the field of learning disabilities in order to highlight the need for the study which I have undertaken. I then discuss, again, the purpose of my study before going on, in Part II of this paper, to a discussion of the

methods used in my study, a presentation of the results of my data collection, and the conclusions which I drew from the data.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Literature

In the following chapter I will discuss literature about effects on learning disabilities which continue into adulthood.

When research into outcomes was reviewed to consider progress made in the development of reading and writing skills and the impact of learning disabilities on students' lives, conclusions were varied. While most results indicated that the prevalence of difficulties and manifestations of learning disabilities persisted after remediation and into adulthood, other research indicated that there was limited impact.

Several of the studies involving outcomes will be reviewed in the following pages. These studies included outcomes for both those who have and have not received remedial treatment. In earlier studies reviewed (prior to the passage of PL 94-142) students were not identified as learning disabled. However, these studies involved those who were identified as having difficulty in areas of reading and writing acquisition. Contrasts in the conclusions of these studies highlighted the complexity of research in this field, as I have discussed in the



previous chapter. I have ended this literature review with a review of qualitative studies which have been done regarding students with learning disabilities involving reading and writing which will lead me into a discussion of my current research topic.

#### Academic Achievement

Silver and Hagin (1964) conducted a follow-up study of students seen at the Bellevue Hospital Mental Hygiene Clinic (a population who would probably be currently classified as learning disabled). Their study involved the long-term gain in neurological, perceptual and reading conditions and abilities in students who would now most probably be identified as learning disabled. Reading progress was judged from ten to 12 years after treatment by comparing intelligence quotients on the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale and reading scores on the Wide Range Achievement Test. An adequate reader was considered to be someone whose reading score was not more than ten points below adult IQ on the WAIS. Fifteen of the 24 subjects who were followed were considered to be adequate readers. This group was considered to have had developmental rather than organic problems, and to have been less behind in reading at the time of remediation.

Balow and Blomquist (1965) found that in a ten to 15 year follow-up study, males from middle-class homes in a

metropolitan area, although severely disabled in reading in elementary school, attained near the average adult reading proficiency, and graduated from high school. They also found that these males possessed mild emotional disorders of a neurotic type, and found jobs over a wide range of occupational levels. However, proportionately more of these men, when they were compared with average readers who made normal progress through school, had semiskilled and unskilled jobs.

Herjanic and Penick (1972), in a study in which they overviewed the literature of reading disorders, concluded that there was little literature which attempted to chronicle the natural history of the disabled reader, and that the conclusions were indecisive and contradictory. Citing Herman (1959), Robinson and Smith (1962), Silver and Hagin (1964), Carter (1964), Balow and Blomquist (1965), Howden (1967), Preston and Yarrington (1967), Rawson (1968) and Hardy (1968), they charted the following conclusions respectively. Resolution of word blindness (which in contemporary literature would be referred to as a reading disability) was rare, although the consequences of this problem in adult life depended upon the demands made on individuals by their occupations. If students were intellectually able, they could be rehabilitated so that they would be capable of fulfilling occupational goals retained in adulthood. If a reading handicap

disappeared in high school, the student would have a better chance of favorable educational and occupational outcomes. Although individuals with reading problems often made gains in reading, the gains were not comparable to those made by other students of their grade level.

At the conclusion of their study, Herjanic and Penick stated that long-term studies of the effectiveness of remediation upon the adult lives of disabled readers were badly needed. They stated that there were questions that should be explored such as whether certain identifiable groups profit more from remedial programs. They explained that the question of the effects of long term remediation could not be answered until a comprehensive study was made of the history of the disorder with carefully selected controls. These controls involved considering the various factors which were part of the continuation of the childhood reading disorder (factors such as unfavorable family situation, family history of the reading disability, conduct problems).

A follow-up study conducted by Frauenheim and Heckerl (1983) discussed academic (including reading) and intellectual test results of adults who had originally been diagnosed as learning disabled as children. Frauenheim had originally studied 40 of these students in 1978. At that time IQ tests and reading tests were performed. Eleven of these adults participated in the

follow-up study. Their mean age was 27 years old. They were administered the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale--Revised (WAIS-R), Gates McKillop Oral Reading Test-MacGinitie Silent Reading Vocabulary, and the Monroe Sherman Spelling and Arithmetic Tests.

After 17 years the IQ scores remained essentially the same. At age ten mean reading test scores were grade equivalent 1.9, at age 20, grade equivalent 2.7, and at age 27, grade equivalent 2.6. Mean spelling scores were 1.4, 2.0 and 2.1 respectively. Mean arithmetic scores were 3.1, 4.4 and 4.6. The authors of this study defined the subjects as representing the severe end of the continuum of dyslexia (which they have defined as a disorder in which the capacity to learn to read is impaired). However, they state that they did not consider the cases which they had reported as atypical. They argue that the acceptance of such a lack of success in those with severe learning difficulties was not always recognized by those in the field. They express the belief that recognition of lack of success was important in order that considerations be made for lifelong intervention strategies for those with learning difficulties.

More positive outcomes were reported by Cobb and Crump (1984). In a study of young adults who had been identified as learning disabled, they found that despite the fact that only half had graduated from high

school, only five percent reported having reading problems as an adult. Although the majority of respondents earned less than \$10,000, they reported moderate satisfaction in their jobs.

Johnson and Blalock (1987) found that adults, who had no history of remediation but who were treated in a clinic, had achievement difficulties in the areas of spelling, written language, reading and mathematics. These findings were consistent with findings of academic deficits in individuals with learning disabilities who did receive remediation while in school.

Spreeen (1987) studied 203 adults who were identified as learning disabled as children and treated at a clinic. He divided his subjects into categories, indicating levels of neurological involvement. The control group for Spreeen's study consisted of teacher nomination of students who were considered to have experienced no reading problems. He found that learning problems reflected in academic tests given to them as children were clearly not overcome. His findings indicated that severity of neurological findings were related to poorer outcomes when IQ levels of children were matched.

Contrasting findings were discovered by Bruck (1987). She looked at 101 adults who had been identified as having a learning disability as children. Subjects were not included in her study if primary behavioral, emotional

disturbances or major neurological abnormalities or physical problems were found in childhood records taken from clinic records. Her control group was taken from a selection of siblings of subjects. (The siblings were excluded if they had had academic problems.) Bruck found that subjects had sufficient academic skills to function in a wide variety of activities, although higher educational achievements required longer amounts of time. She found that the same number of subjects as siblings had dropped out of school (a small percentage) and that many were involved with higher education.

Hoffman, Sheldon, Minskoff, Sautter, Steidle, Baker, Bailey and Echols (1987) surveyed 381 adults with learning disabilities eligible for vocational training. (The typical respondent was unemployed, unmarried, 23 years old and male.) Survey results indicated that academic problems continued into adulthood (primarily listed as reading and spelling). The adults indicated that they would still like to receive help in these academic areas.

#### Life Adjustment

Limited research on life adjustment of adults with learning disabilities also indicates mixed results. Some of the disparity in results may be the result of category definitions which refer to different aspects of life adjustment and as a result of differences in subject

identification. Rogan and Hartman (1976) found adults exhibited low self-esteem and difficulty dealing with tension, while Brown (1984) found social skills problems at work. White, Alley, Deshler, Schumaker, Warner and Clark (1982) found adults diagnosed as learning disabled had less social and recreational involvement in communities.

Results indicating successful lives in most cases were discovered in research by Obring and Isonhood (1986). Twenty-five young adults who had been enrolled in learning disabilities classes were studied. Sixty percent of those studied completed a high school diploma and 35 percent completed one to three years of college. Many positive indicators of adult functioning were found including attainment of driver's licenses and cars and savings accounts.

Outcome studies regarding vocational adjustment of adults who have been diagnosed as learning disabled indicate that these adults often have vocational experiences which are adequate, but that they must often expend extraordinary effort. Job performance of these adults was often impeded by low reading levels, poor written language, feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure, attention disorders and organizational difficulties (Johnson & Blalock, 1987). Studies by Fafard and Haubrich (1981) and White, Alley, Deshler, Schumaker, Warner and

Clark (1982) indicate lower job status and job satisfaction.

Spreen (1987) also found that job types and average income levels were lower in follow-up studies of adults who were identified as learning disabled when they were children, and that personal adjustment was strained from childhood on. Spreen noted that the women's income levels were considerably lower than those of the men in his study. Verbal IQ and academic achievement were strongly related to outcomes. Socio-economic status of the children was also found to be a contributor to adult adjustment outcomes.

Bruck (1985) found that subjects with learning disabilities had similar types of employment roles and held similar jobs to those of sibling controls. Groups were also comparable on measures of frequency of delinquent and asocial acts, although subjects did have more problems with psychological adjustment. Bruck attributed some of the success of her subjects to their early identification and help and to counseling which their parents received through the clinic.

Life adjustment needs were found by Hoffman et al. (1987) when adults with learning disabilities were surveyed. They indicated that adults had difficulty with daily living skills such as filling out job applications and balancing checkbooks, as well as difficulty with



impulsive behavior. The adults were considered to have poor self-concepts and social skills by those who worked with them.

### Literacy and Learning Disabilities: Qualitative Research

Studies of students with reading and learning disabilities using qualitative methods present an alternative to quantitative research. In qualitative research, it is possible to define the specific context in which students are involved in a manner which takes into account day to day close examination over time of students' lives placed within a specific context. Qualitative research enables exploration of reasons for learning difficulties which help us to understand the interplay of the various paradigms of disabilities, when the experiences of students are explained in the context of their school lives.

Qualitative research tells us much that is interesting, distressing and enlightening about the lives of students with learning disabilities. Despite the fact that we are able to look at particular aspects of the lives of specific students through this research, reading this literature also reinforces the notion that while there are commonalities of experience of experience among these students, there are also many differences. Raim and Adams (1982) explain that this type of research may be

important for that very reason; that is, while we often expect that common definitions of these students exist, and act upon this notion in planning educational treatments, there are many differences within the learning disabled population which become obvious when students with learning disabilities are viewed individually and closely. The case study "enables teachers to see 'flesh and blood' versions of the definition [of learning disabilities] which often is open to the vagaries of different interpretations from various theorists" (p. 118).

There have been a limited number of studies of this type which investigate students with learning disabilities. However, researchers such as Johnston (1985), Kos (1991), and Fairbanks (1992) have contributed to the field through qualitative research regarding those with disabilities in the areas of reading and writing.

Johnston (1985) emphasize the fact that qualitative research involving a case study approach to research is important because it allows for the psychological and social determinants of school failure. Johnston reinforce the ideas stated by Torgesen that there is a paradigm involving explanation of learning disabilities which involves the applied behavior paradigm as differentiated from the paradigms involving neurological deficits and information processing difficulties.

Johnston explains his belief that if learning needs are able to be matched with teaching strategies, then optimum success will occur. This approach, he emphasizes, focuses on the individual needs of students. Johnston also explains that he chose a case study methodology based on the idea, as stated above, that differences in behavior which may be delineated through case studies are as important as the commonalities noticed among individuals. He also argues, using a Vygotskian perspective, that an understanding of reading difficulties cannot be gleaned outside of the social and motivational environment in which they occur.

Subjects in Johnston's study included three men, ages 45, 26 and 43. Johnston concluded that they were of average intelligence based on their occupational levels. (He based this assumption on Sternberg's model [1984] of intelligence and on the American Association of Mental Deficiency adaptive behavior criteria.) Their instructional levels, based on the Woods and Moe Analytical Reading Inventory (1981) were at the second, third and pre-reading levels. The men of 45 and 43 had remained in high school through the eighth grade, while the third subject had remained until grade eleven.

Data for this study was collected during eight individual instruction sessions with these men. Sessions ranged from 45 minutes to two hours. The sessions were

tape recorded. Johnston concludes from this data that reading difficulties might have occurred because of conceptual difficulties regarding aspects of reading which were not acknowledged by teachers and consequently remained uncorrected through instruction. Difficulties might also have occurred because these individuals failed to acquire adequate reading strategies. He also concludes that anxiety associated with a need to avoid being seen as stupid caused these men to avoid systematic practice and feedback. Finally, he concludes that, given the reasons for reading difficulties which he observed, preventing reading failure could be aided if these factors, along with motivational factors, were considered. He emphasizes the need to look at reading difficulties within context, through understanding of history and students' motivation and goals. In summary, he states that human feelings and thinking must be integrated into our understanding of reading failure, or our understanding will always remain partial.

Kos (1991) also presents insights gained from multiple case studies of four reading disabled middle school students whose reading levels were below the third grade level. Broad questions were asked regarding the students' feelings about reading; however, most interview questions were dependent upon questions that arose during her analysis of data. A method of participant

observation was used while Kos was tutoring the students in reading. Students were observed during regular classroom instruction as well. Finally, Kos collected data from students' educational records in order to understand the students' school experiences.

Similar to results of Johnston's study, Kos' interviews with these students indicated that (1) reading progress of these students was hindered by their lack of effective use of reading strategies, (2) students perceived that their reading instruction had been ineffective, primarily because of the excessive and tedious emphasis on skills instruction, instruction which they recalled as often being needlessly repetitive; (3) stress was a factor interfering with students' progress. Kos' study reveals that students were aware of the need to develop their reading abilities and that they perceived themselves as different from others and feared that the differences would leave them open to ridicule. She also found that students were highly motivated. Kos reports that students evaluated their reading experiences as effective. Kos states that reading educators would also consider the reading experiences that the students had to be ineffective. She concludes that the experiences and insights of students may be able to help to improve educational practices regarding students with learning disabilities in the areas of reading and writing.

Many of the experiences described by the men in Johnston's study and the students in Kos' study were also described by a college student named Glenn, in a case study by Fairbanks (1992). Glenn was a college student who was tutored by Fairbanks at a college clinic for students with learning disabilities. Eventually Glenn and Fairbanks explored the history of Glenn's educational experiences as an elementary and high school student identified as learning disabled. Glenn was labeled in grade three because of his difficulties learning to read and difficulties associated with memory tasks. He received much of his education outside of mainstream classes in classes which were designed specifically for students with disabilities. Many of the difficulties in learning to read which were expressed by the men in Johnston's study and the students in Kos' study were also discussed by Glenn and Fairbanks. Both Glenn and Fairbanks express much dissatisfaction with the educational system. Fairbanks points out that schools are preoccupied with students' failings and therefore do not notice their strengths. She states that in schools we feel "compelled to label those students whose performance is more eccentric than others" (p. 477). According to Fairbanks, schools are tied to the belief that students must begin with basic skills, and that, therefore, the reasoning skills of these students is not taken into

account when instruction for them is planned. She states that her experiences with labeled students indicate that a disabling rhetoric dominates remedial programs and this rhetoric shuts the students out of real learning. According to Fairbanks, remedial programs are driven by a need to fix inherent deficits in students and consequently programs are set up in which instruction is rigid and repetitious in order to make sure that skills are acquired.

According to Glenn, his schooling consisted of meaningless and repetitious busy work. He was kept away from acquisition of important academic skills. He felt that having been denied many academic experiences had left him ill-prepared for life after high school, particularly the demands of college. He believed that not only was he denied academic exposure, but that expectations for him were minimal. He was discouraged by guidance counselors from even considering pursuing a college education.

Fairbanks, in interpreting the story of his education which Glenn told to her, thought that Glenn's parents were passive victims in Glenn's education. Since they were not educational experts, they relied on the schools' explanations and planning. Glenn felt socially stigmatized and actively sought associations with students outside of his LD classrooms. Sure that his education was

inadequate, Glenn forced the school to allow him to attend regular high school classes. Once this happened, he found himself unprepared; he attributed this lack of preparation to his previous inadequate classroom experiences. Glenn saw his difficulties not as resulting from his deficits, but from a lack of opportunity to learn. He attributed his ability to retain confidence in himself to his upbringing and his association with peers who had high aspirations.

The studies of Johnston (1985) and Fairbanks (1992), and to a lesser degree that of Kos (1991), rely on retrospection. The potential problem with retrospective interview information because of its reliability, particularly in the case of memory about difficult experiences and the interpretation of these memories (Yarrow, 1963; Johnston, 1985) indicates the need for a study which looks at the lives of students with reading and writing disabilities not only through retrospection, but also within the context of their school world.

The research which I conducted allows students with learning disabilities to be studied within the context of their school worlds. This use of a qualitative approach, which takes context into account when describing the experiences of students with reading and writing difficulties, allows an added perspective to be given which is crucial if the complex issues involved with



education of students' with learning disabilities are to be understood. I expect that this perspective will add information, either in the nature of creation of new theories or through the verification of those which are in existence, which will add knowledge to the field of learning disabilities in the areas of reading and writing that will be of use to both students and educators.

#### Summary - Chapter II

In Chapter II of this study I began by presenting a review of outcome research in the field of reading and learning disabilities. This review indicated that there are conflicting findings regarding the effectiveness of treatments of these students and the academic achievement and life adjustment of those identified as having learning disabilities. Since subjects and control groups were often differently defined in studies, some of the variation in conclusions regarding the impact of learning disabilities on adult lives was probably attributable to the variation in definition of subjects and control groups, as well as to the lack of definition of treatments. Most evidence, however, pointed to the fact that academic, emotional, and social difficulties persisted throughout the adulthood of those with learning disabilities, diminishing the overall quality of their lives.

In this chapter, I then presented a review of three qualitative research studies. Authors in these studies concluded that feelings impact significantly on the ability to learn of students with reading and writing difficulties. They also concluded that students recalled their instruction as inadequate, and that they often felt stigmatized by their learning difficulties. A qualitative study by Johnston (1985) in which adults reading between pre-reading and third grade levels were interviewed indicated feelings of anxiety, related to fear of being thought of as stupid, which led them to avoid practice and feedback. There were also problems with their reading instruction. Johnston emphasized that human feelings and thoughts cannot be overlooked when studying learning difficulties and that reading difficulties should be looked at within the context in which they occur. Qualitative research conducted by Kos (1991) indicated that when middle school students were interviewed and observed using methods of participant observation, they were seen as having problems with reading strategies, their reading instruction was viewed as having been effective, and stress was pointed to as a factor which hindered their progress. A case study of a college student done by Fairbanks (1992) revealed similar concerns regarding the ineffectiveness of reading instruction. Labeling and consequent separation into special classes

were also seen as impediments to the student's education and his ability to develop self-confidence.

I concluded this chapter with a discussion of the contribution which I expect my research will make to an understanding of students with learning disabilities in the areas of reading and writing. I explained that my study will present a close look at students with reading and writing disabilities in the context of their school worlds, thereby allowing an added perspective to existing research in this field. I explained that the opportunity for description of the lives of these students will provide a vehicle for verification of existing educational theories as well as a possible means for the creation of new theories.

In Part II of this paper I will discuss methods used in my study. I will then present data and the conclusions which I drew from the analysis of data collected through my qualitative research regarding the school lives of high school students with reading and writing disabilities.

## PART II

### CHAPTER III

#### METHOD

##### Purpose

This study was a study of high school students identified as having a learning disability. I conducted the study using qualitative methods in order to understand what the school world of these students is like. The observation of these students within the context of their school was undertaken in order to gain a perspective that will help to give awareness of the complexity of the issues involved in the education of these students. I hoped that the methods used in this study would provide a perspective which would add depth to the research which had previously been conducted regarding these students.

##### Guiding Questions

The following questions guided my observations of these high school students.

(1) What happens to the high school student with learning disabilities in learning situations within school settings?

(2) How do high school students with learning disabilities understand their social situations?

(3) How do students with learning disabilities understand their school world?

(4) How do teachers and administrators understand these students?

### Site

The current study took place in a school of about 800 students. Since it housed a much greater population of students at one time, my sense was not the usual sense that I have in a high school of crowded and noisy corridors. Even when classes were changing, the halls seemed only moderately noisy. I did not have the feeling that I must negotiate a path through the halls, even when classes were changing. Neither did I see students pushing and shoving. I rarely heard rude comments or behavior which might be said to be disruptive. I saw what appeared to be pleasant conversations being held, and a general sense of camaraderie among students. Since students with severe disabilities were included in regular school classes, I occasionally noticed students with fairly severe physical and cognitive disabilities within the corridors, often assisted by aides. The presence of students with such handicapping abilities appeared to be taken as a matter of course by other students and staff members. There seemed to be a general expectation that

these students would be helped when necessary, but otherwise expected to go about their business.

The resource room was on the very edge of a part of the school which once housed special education classrooms. When you turned the corner into this wing, there was the sense that you were in a separate part of the school. This year this room was the only room in the wing which was actually used as a classroom. The room next door was used as an office and the room across the hall had some kitchen facilities. The two rooms next to the kitchen were empty with chairs stacked up against the wall. One room held some computers which I only saw used four times by a woman in a wheelchair.

The room on the other side as you progress down the hallway to the end of the building was also empty. There was no furniture in this room. At the end of the corridor was an alcove which housed mailboxes for the special education staff and a phone for their use which was placed on a student-type desk. An office which was used by a counselor was on one side of the alcove. On the other side of the alcove was a room which was used by the special educators as a work room and sometimes as a lunchroom. This room was divided in half by rows of file cabinets which were stacked five feet high. These files held records of the students identified as having educational handicaps. The special education department

secretary's desk was beyond the filing cabinets against the windows. At the end of the corridor was a very large room sometimes used when student assessments were given. The room was also used by a speech therapist when she was in the building.

The rooms on the left side of the corridor were windowless, giving an odd kind of darkness and dankness to that side of the hall. The other rooms, though they had windows, somehow seemed tacked into the building and did not have a sense that classrooms ordinarily have. For example, the room which was totally empty had curtains and a set of doors in the center which led to the outside. The last two rooms were part of an auto mechanics section of the school before a new vocational education wing was added. The unusually large size of these rooms, and the height of the ceilings, gave a sense of vast emptiness and a feeling of separateness from the rest of the building staff.

#### The Room

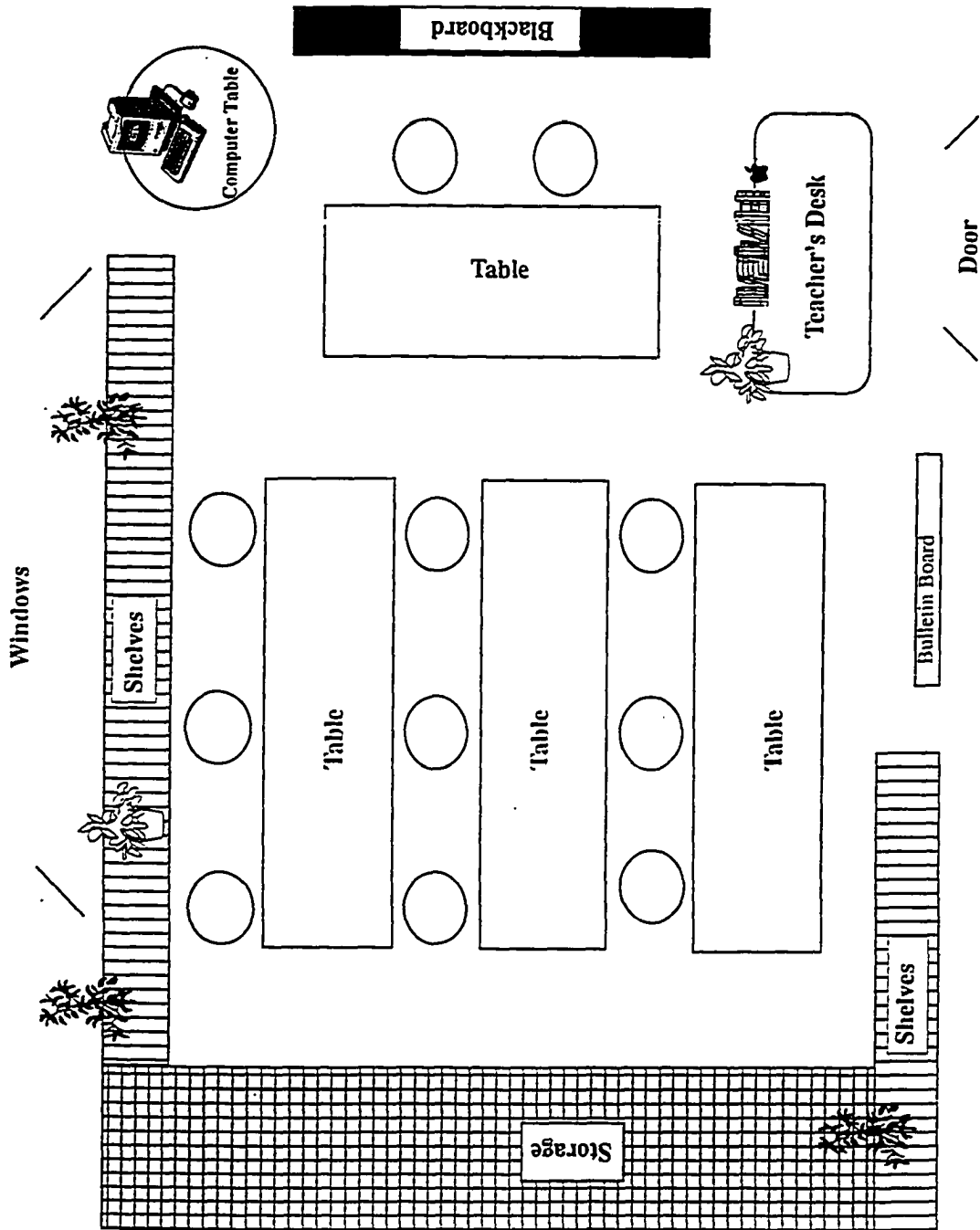
Most of the materials in the resource room were quite old. There was a shelf of books that were of the type usually called high interest, low level, which might have been used with groups of students or a single student. There were a few trade books which would probably be described as either common favorites or classic adolescent

books such as Tex or Christy. There was a 25 year old set of encyclopedias on a shelf by themselves and a map of the world on the wall. Under the map were shelves which held magazines used for projects and supplies such as glue. There were also several colorful posters which the teacher had put up and a bulletin board on which was pinned the school's philosophy, the schedule of class periods and pictures of some of the students and teachers taken during the previous year. There were several large plants on the shelves and a computer and printer in one corner of the room. The computer and/or printer were sometimes not working. The ceiling above the printer was peeling and looked as though plaster was chipping off and falling. At the back of the room was a sort of an alcove which held a desk used by a paraprofessional during parts of the day and a window at the end of the alcove which looked into an adjacent office which was used by counselors in the school. There was a phone in this office which would often ring incessantly at times when the office was not in use. Occasionally snatches of conversations from that room could be heard. The atmosphere of the room was dominated by the dominance of the nurturing and vital personality of Jean and the paraprofessional.

A figure of the classroom appears on the following page as Figure 1.



Figure 1  
Classroom Sketch



## Participants

### Students

Participants in this study were high school students who were identified by their school special education team as having a learning disability. (The definition of a learning disability delineated by the Federal Register under Public Law 94-142 and defined in the New Hampshire Standards for the Education of Handicapped Students is the definition used by school special education teams.)

As has been previously described, the open ended nature of this definition makes it possible for many students to fit into this handicapping category. The students whom I chose to study had difficulty with reading and writing. Their reading levels were at approximately the second/third through fifth/sixth grade levels. Their writing abilities were similarly delayed. However, I felt they were very representative of the variety of students in these sections. I observed other students during my participant observation in the two different resource room reading sections. I found the observations of groups to be as valuable as that of individual students.

### School Personnel

During this research I also worked closely with the resource room teacher. She was an experienced teacher

having taught Special Education classes for more than ten years. Other special education teachers, classroom teachers, administrators, counselors and paraprofessionals who were interviewed had also held their respective jobs for many years.

### Method

#### Participant Observation

Participant observation is an attempt by a researcher to become immersed in a culture. Fetterman (1989) states that culture may be defined from either a materialist or ideational perspective. The materialist interpretation of culture sees it as the sum of a social group's observable patterns of behavior, while the ideational definition defines culture through a cognitive approach, which defines culture as comprised of ideas, beliefs, and knowledge of a certain group of people (Fetterman, 1989, p. 27). In the current study I have attempted to understand culture through an awareness of both of these approaches and through data collection which therefore attended to both observation of patterns of behavior and eliciting knowledge and beliefs held by participants in the culture. In some cases in participant observation, participants collaborate with participant observers. In this study, there was considerable collaboration and discussion between the resource room teacher and myself

regarding classroom events and student and teacher actions. I considered this to be a great asset in allowing me both an added means to triangulate information and a reminder of the many perspectives which may be brought to bear upon recounting and understanding of behaviors and events which were observed.

Traditionally, participant observers have seen their role as nonjudgmental. The observer attempts to be true to understanding the world which is being observed with all of its complexities and the multitude of perspectives possible. Patton and Westby (1992) emphasize learning based on empathy as part of qualitative research. They state that empathy comes from personal contact with those being studied and involves, "being able to take and understand the stance, position, feelings, experiences and world view of others" (p. 11).

Since the 1970s participant observation has been used to help assess educational programs and events. As a participant observer, I saw myself as attempting to adopt a stance of empathy. As I have stated in discussing the purpose of this study, I was not primarily interested in taking an evaluative stance. However, some degree of evaluation was involved in the analyzing and drawing of conclusions from data obtained as a participant observer. In reviewing my role as a participant observer, I would agree with Powdermaker when she remarks in Stranger and

Friend (1966) that she had never fooled herself into thinking that she had "gone native." I felt as she did, that some days I was part of what was happening in the resource room and other days I was very much removed from being a participant. I felt like both a stranger and a friend throughout this research. My stance was sometimes one of empathy, sometimes of understanding of events and feelings, sometimes of confusion, sometimes of anger, sometimes of detachment. The shifting nature of my stance, I believe, highlights the complexity of the role of participant observer, the notion of cultural interpretation and qualitative research in general.

I began this study by observing a resource room setting. I observed two different periods of instruction which I have called Section I and Section II from January through May. During this time, field notes were taken. I also spent this same time from September through December as a period of entry and orientation to the setting. (No notes were taken during that time.) Students were scheduled in the resource room for one period of each day for specific instruction in reading and writing. This period of observation allowed me to watch without being distracted by my own participation. As time went on, I became increasingly involved in some teaching activities in the resource room. Therefore, I became much more of a participant. I decided that a greater degree of

participation allowed me to understand more fully what was happening in this setting and also allowed me to more easily gain the trust of the students who acted as my informants. The teachers with whom I worked were comfortable with my presence and with my active participation (under their direction). In this sense, I saw this methodology as somewhat more collaborative than might always occur in qualitative research.

In Section I the students were not very receptive to having me in their classroom. My impression was that, in spite of my efforts to establish rapport with students, I was often seen as a threatening presence, one which was not welcome. I do not believe that I ever developed a level of trust with these students. I believe the students in this section saw me as another person (teacher) who would make impossible academic demands, and would discover their academic (and sometimes personal) inadequacies and one more obstacle to their primary goal of avoiding the conflict which academic attempts created. This reflects both the difficulty of participant observation in settings with adolescents and the degree to which these students had lost affiliation with the adult community.

As time passed, I found most students in Section II became comfortable with my presence. I was able to work with some students in helping the teacher remediate. In

Section II I believe the students saw me as another person who could help and, in some cases, a possible confidant.

### Field Notes

I recorded field notes after each period of participant observation. As I wrote these notes I took into account the role which I played as a participant observer. I attempted to take notes by recalling key words and phrases which reoccurred in informants' discussions and by concentrating on recalling beginnings and endings of conversations. Margins were left in order to allow me to make comments. My notes were reviewed approximately weekly and my feelings, ideas and thoughts were recorded separately as I reflected upon my notes. These reflections were shared and discussed with my dissertation director. I did not take notes until after I had left the setting because I thought that it would interfere with my relationship with the students (participants/informants) and because I felt it would be disruptive to the classes which were in a somewhat small room.

### Interviews

An open-ended type of interviewing was used during this research. "Initially, field researchers ask questions in such a way as to enable people to talk about what is on their minds and what is of concern to them

without forcing them to respond to the observers' interests, concerns, or preconceptions" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 48). They state that after initial questioning has allowed themes and perspectives to emerge, questioning becomes more direct. The direction is determined both by the stated interests of the informants and by the interest of the researcher based on emergent themes and perspectives. During this study I interviewed students who were identified as being learning disabled, regular and special educators, administrators, counselors and paraprofessionals.

### Students

The students whom I interviewed during this research were more verbally reticent than those whom I have previously interviewed in other situations. They lacked the confidence and verbal skills to "just keep talking" when a very open-ended question was asked. However, I still began this way and modified my plans as necessary.

Informal and formal interviews were effected by several factors. First, as previously mentioned, students in Section I did not trust me. This lack of trust limited the amount that they talked when I was present as well as their willingness to answer formal interview questions. In my opinion, language difficulties of many of these students also altered the nature of informal and formal



interviews. Their difficulties with expressive, especially pragmatic, language was another factor which modified their ability to explain their opinions and ideas regarding happenings in their school lives. Finally, many of these students appeared to have problems in reflecting upon happenings in their lives. These factors are probably intertwined, making specific analysis of these limitations difficult.

These specific questions were used in all formal interviews of students. (1) "Tell me about school here." (2) "What has school been like in the past?" (3) "Tell me what you're ideal school would be like." (4) "What do you plan to do in the future?"

#### School Personnel

When interviewing teachers and administrators, I was particularly interested in learning what they perceived the school world of these learning disabled students to be like. I also wanted to know what their experiences had been while working with students who had such difficulty reading and writing. I was interested in how this impacted upon their attitudes toward the students and toward their teaching design (methods).

During formal interviews with teachers and administrators, I always asked the following questions:

(1) "What do you think school is like for these

students?" (2) "Would you be willing to share some of the teaching (administrative) experience which you have had working (interacting) with them?" Interviews were audiotaped. Notes were taken from these tapes.

### Document Analysis

I reviewed the files of the four students whom I chose as case studies based on my opinion that they were representative of the students whom I observed. This was done as a means to verify specific data regarding their past schooling. I was also allowed to view school papers of students in the two resource room classrooms in which I was a participant observer. I was interested in reviewing these papers for several reasons. These papers gave me a sense of the level of difficulty which the students have when given assignments dealing with reading and writing. Also, some of these papers proved rich in data about their lives and ideas.

### Data Analysis

I analyzed my data by frequently reading through it in order to be familiar with it. I was aware of different hunches regarding interpretation and noted these. I looked for emerging themes in conversations, observations, interviews and documents. I read literature as research progressed--literature which could shed light upon

emerging patterns and themes. I began coding data by listing all themes, concepts, and ideas which emerged as data was collected.

### Development of Theory

In this study my goals were both to describe and generate theory. My primary purpose was not to verify theory. While purely descriptive studies are marked by a minimum of interpretation, I wished to go beyond description in this study. In order to generate theory, I used the method of grounded theory which was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In grounded theory, theories, concepts, propositions and hypotheses are developed from the data, rather than other research, prior assumptions or existing theoretical frameworks.

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge...

The purpose of grounded theory method is, of course, to build theory that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study. Researchers working in this tradition also hope that their theories will ultimately be related to others within their respective disciplines in a cumulative fashion, and that the theory's implications will have useful application. (Straus & Corbin, 1990, p. 23)

### Triangulation

Participant observation with accompanying field notes, interviews with students, teachers and administrators, and document reviews provided a means of triangulation in this study. "Triangulation is often thought of as a way of guarding against researcher bias and checking out accounts from different informants" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 68).

### Writing up Research

My intent in writing up the findings was to use a style of writing close to that which Van Maanen called "impressionist" in his book, Tales of the Field (1988). In this book he suggests and gives examples of three main styles of writing, "Realistic," "Confessional," and "Impressionistic." According to Van Maanen, the form of an impressionist tale is "dramatic recall." "Events are recounted roughly in the order in which they are said to have occurred and carry with them all the odds and ends that are associated with the remembered events." Impressionistic tales sometimes stand alone, but can also stand with commentary. "The intention is not to tell readers what to think of an experience but to show them the experience from beginning to end and thus draw them immediately into the story to work out its problems and puzzles as they unfold" (p. 103).

### Summary - Chapter III

In Chapter III I discussed the site and participants in my study. I also discussed the qualitative methods of data collection which I will use, including participant observation, interviews with students and school personnel, and document analysis. I explained the way in which I analyzed my data by frequently reviewing it and looking for emergent themes. I explained that I used triangulation as a means of verification of data and that I wrote up my data using a style called "impressionistic" by Van Maanen (1988) in Tales of the Field.

In Chapter IV I will present my data through anecdotes of Resource Room Sections I and II and Case Studies of four students from these classrooms. A discussion of my findings will then occur in Chapter V, followed by my conclusions and implications derived from the conclusions, and finally, the limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Data

In Chapter IV I will tell the stories of my observations Resource Room Sections I and II. I will then present case studies of four of these students. I will relate these observations, lay out a story of part of the lives of the students of Sections I and II, keeping in mind that the intertwining of events and people in the lives of these students is far more complex than my observations could ever capture.

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle in which they shall happily appear to do so. He is in the perpetual predicament that the continuity of things is the whole matter for him, of comedy and tragedy; that this continuity is never, by the space of an instant or an inch, broken and that to do anything at all, he has at once intensely to consult and intensely to ignore it. (Henry James, in Newkirk, 1992, p. 5)

As I write these observations, I am aware of the enormous complexity and the continuity of these students' lives. I am aware that I am only capturing sections and sliced up pieces of their lives and that in this manner, both the content and the context have been in a sense destroyed. Nevertheless, I am reporting what I have seen,

through the use of such pieces and, therefore, I acknowledge that I am reporting only a part of the story.

### Student Profiles

The profiles which I will present of students in Sections I and II will be general since permission to ascertain specific student information was not obtained from all students. I believe that information which I have presented represents an accurate general portrayal of these students based on my observations and general classroom information which was available to me.

#### Section I

There were six students in Section I. All of the students were males of age 15 or 16 who were in their sophomore year. Five of the students were scheduled into this section when special educators in the school determined that their reading/writing needs were sufficiently below expected grade levels in order to warrant very small group instruction. Five of the students were therefore removed from a Level One English class after the semester had begun. (There are three levels of classes in the school as well as Advanced Placement classes. Level One is the lowest level.) The sixth student was assigned to the class primarily as the result of a request from his mother that he receive more individualized instruction. The special education staff

also agreed that he did need more individualized instruction. When this student was moved, a paraprofessional was assigned to work in the room primarily with him, but to some extent with others in the class.

Except for the sixth student, the students were very angry about this change. They saw being put into a resource room for Reading (in place of English class) to be a stigmatizing experience. Jean also expressed the idea that students may have resented the move because they were afraid that more specific reading and writing demands would be made upon them in the resource room.

During the first weeks of class, the five students who were initially moved were openly angry, frequently expressing their frustration to Jean and expressing to her that they should not have to stay in the class.

At the time of this study I heard them say little about their feelings or thoughts about school in general. My impression was that they were there because they were supposed to be there and remained there because of their general passive response to their lives as much as for any other reason.

In Section I all students were identified as having a specific learning disability. Two students were also identified as having an emotional handicap. The students'



IQ levels ranged from the "Mentally Deficient" (Standard Score 69 and below) range to the high end of the Average range (Standard Score 90-109). All students had school long histories of difficulty with reading and writing, and students classified as having an emotional handicap had a long history of difficulties in this area. One student had a history of severe difficulties with receptive and expressive language. One student was considered to have difficulty with attention and took daily medication for this problem.

The reading and writing skills of the students in Section I ranged from approximately second to sixth grade levels. (This observation is based on informal reading assessments and informal writing observations.) As I stated above, all students had received remedial services from their youngest school days.

The home life of one of the students was what would be classified as highly supportive in terms of economic, academic and personal needs. The home lives of all other class members could be defined on a spectrum running from unstable to seriously disturbing. I am using the term unstable to mean difficulties in the areas of money, steady job security, an environment in which rules were generally consistent, association by the students with both or one parent on a consistent basis. I am considering seriously disturbing to mean frequent

instances of verbal and physical abuse. In most cases families had resided in the same town for most of the students' school years. Parents or guardians of these students (with the exception of the one student whose home was supportive) had little interaction with the school.

## Section II

Students in Section II were selected to be grouped in one resource room period by the teachers who had had them in the previous year. One of the six students was new to the school system and another had been out of school for an extended period of time and was returning. Therefore, the group was not a cohesive group of students who had gone through years of schooling together.

I did not hear any of these students express dissatisfaction at being placed in this particular resource room situation for reading. Several times I heard members of the group remark that they were glad that they were in the class and would like to have the teacher next year.

One of the students stated that he was only in school because he had to be and therefore it didn't really matter to him what classes he was in. He said that he had to attend school because he was expected to graduate and he knew that he must do this. (It was unclear when he was questioned who expected this of him, but he seemed to be

referring to his family. In the past he had frequently been absent from school. According to one teacher he had been "read the riot act" by members of the school staff at the beginning of school regarding the importance of his attendance and serious efforts.)

Three of the students had commented that they liked coming to school OK, because all their friends were there and it was boring to be at home. Another student said that she liked coming to school better than she had in the past, and that she felt particularly comfortable in the resource room. I never heard the last student comment about her presence in school or in that classroom. She rarely commented about situations, even when she was asked directly. Her reply was often to smile and shrug slightly.

In general, then, the students in Section II were not unhappy to be in the Resource Room although they had mixed feelings about school. They all had a history of considerable difficulties in school stemming from their earliest school years. All had daily tutoring and remedial work or had been in special self-contained programming. One of the students was the exception and had not been identified until the present school year, and therefore had not received specific help under the legal auspices of Public Law 94-142.

In Section II all students were identified as having a learning disability. IQ levels of the students ranged from approximately Low Average to the higher end of Average.

Academic levels of these students varied from approximately second/third grade reading ability to sixth grade reading ability. Writing abilities were about the same as reading abilities.

Home lives of these students varied. Some lives were quite disrupted, while others appeared relatively stable.

#### Anecdotes

In this portion of this study, I will share with you three anecdotes from my observations of the resource room classes. I have included two different anecdotes regarding Section I, in order to highlight the fact that, in that section, experiences on different days were often very different. As you will observe after reading the two anecdotes related to Section I, some days were more successful than others. Behavior of students was inconsistent. When writing about Section II, I felt that only one anecdote was necessary. In that section, students' behavior was far more consistent. Days were more routine. Progress was much steadier. I have concluded this portion with a description of the final project presentations by both Sections I and II. I have

done so because I believe that final events of the year are representative events of the happenings of the entire year.

Not A Dream Day - Section I

All of the students whom I observed during Section I, except Alan, were angry. They were angry because they had been pulled from their regular English class and placed in a Resource Room for that period. They had all been in the same class, a lower track English class for the first part of the year. Then, because those teachers assigned to be their case managers had decided that they needed more intense instruction in reading, they had been reassigned. (Alan was the exception, since his parents had requested his reassignment because they felt that he could not receive the intense instruction which he needed in the regular classroom. His reassignment was also different, because he was to have a paraprofessional come to the room with him and work primarily with him, although she was also allowed to work with others for some of the time, also.) The class consisted of Alan, Louis, Scott, Fred, Joel and Jimmy.

I could hear the noise in the corridor as I waited for the students to arrive, that odd rush of sound that occurs between the long periods of silence when classes were in session was occurring--three minutes for a whole

school of students to rearrange themselves before their next 50 minute classroom period was happening. The shuffling of boots, squeaking of sneakers and jumble of voices was wafting into the resource room. Several of the students from Section I began to arrive. They came with huge bags of books which they seemed most often to drag along the floor on their way in. None of them looked at me upon entry; they clustered at a middle table in the room and began talking. Jimmy arrived and said hello to me. Alan arrived last. He looked at me, as he always did, gave me a big smile, and walked to the edge of the table. He sat down with the rest of the students, but sat with his chair a bit removed from the table as though not quite wishing or daring to make himself a part of the group. Dan said, "Hi, Alan."

Alan looked at him.

"Hey, you going to the mall tonight, Fred?" Cory queried. He spoke by looking squarely at Fred, and with a kind of expectation that made the question take on an air of unexpected urgency.

"I dunno," Fred responded with his head down. The fact that he wore a baseball hat which seemed to shadow his face made it hard to see the expression on his face.

"Maybe if my sister goes, she'll take me."

"Can I go? Will you pick me up? from Scott."

"Maybe."

"Well, will you ask your sister?" A grunt from Fred which was hard to decipher as a yes or a no.

"Well, will you?"

"Ya, ya, I'll ask her." (Head still down.)

"I'm going to be getting my license. You better watch out," from Jimmy.

"You are, you are? How are you gettin' the money for Driver Ed.? From your Dad?"

"Some, but I gotta earn some too."

"Well, how you gonna do that?" No reply.

"Come on, Dan, how you gonna do that?"

"I'll do it." There was a low rumble of anger in his voice.

It was hard to see the faces of the students as they spoke. They all had on hats which shadowed their faces and when they talked they were often looking down--all but Alan, that is. He was dressed in what would be described as a more preppy sort of outfit than the rest--no hat, nice sweater, nice informal pants. The others had on bright shirts which were of more faddish styles.

"I'm not going to be here next semester, anyway," says Scott. "I'm going to go and live with my mom. Then I'll be able to meet all of the football players, 'cause her husband knows them."

"Ya! You're going to live with your Mom?"

"No, he ain't. He's always saying that."

"Yes, I am," an angry retort.

"Hey, how come your aunt don't speak English? I called your house the other day and she said, 'Scott... something about you were out playing with the little kids'... but I couldn't understand her."

"I don't know what you mean. She talks fine," another angry reply.

The bell has since rung and Jean, their teacher, walks into the room carrying a stack of papers. "Good morning, everyone. Sorry I'm a little late. I had to speak with one of your teachers. Let me get your folders for you so you can get right to work."

"Hey, Jean, are we goin' to look at the stuff for the trip?" from Dan. Jean got the students' folders from her desk drawer and handed them out.

Fred lumbered over to the tape radio-cassette player and put on a rap tape. The insistent redundancy of the rapper began to sound in the background. Everyone began shuffling the folder papers except Alan. He sat quietly. Mary, the paraprofessional, came in and sat next to him. She asked him what he had to do. He looked at her. She took the folder and found the paper which had a list of his assignments. She pulled it out and said that they would read a book together. He looked at her and waited.

Louis began to rock backward on the back two legs of his chair, arranged his weight on those legs, and then



suddenly shifted it so that the chair banged forward onto the front legs. He did this several times and the kuchang of the metal cleats on the leg bottoms created a jarring, surprisingly hollow plunk sound. He did not seem to know that he was doing it after the first time, but seemed oddly caught up in the rhythm of the motion and the sound.

"Keep your chair down, Louis." Mary gently placed her hand on his arm. He continued to rock.

"Louis, you'll have to move if you cannot be more quiet," a reminder in a well modulated voice from Jean.

Louis looked up as though surprised that he had been spoken to. He looked down at his chair legs and stopped the movement.

"Jean, can you help me?" from Jimmy.

All of the students were working on a story copied by Jean from Rap magazine. It was a story about Mike Tyson and the charges of rape against him. Jean went over to help. Scott elbowed Fred and asked if he had the answer to number four. Fred, who had answered almost all of the questions, gave Scott the answer. Scott had only answered question one and four. Jean began to help Jimmy. Mary was reading with Alan, but stopped to show Scott the place of another answer. Scott said he couldn't find it.

"Tell me, Mary," he said in a sweet and sidling kind of voice.

Mary smiled and said, "You look."

"Hey, Fred, what's the answer to 5?" Scott asked in a loud voice. Fred looked at his paper and gave him the answer. Suddenly there was a loud bang. Everyone looked up. Louis had held his folder up several inches above the table and suddenly banged it down on the table.

Jean asked him to move and he went to another table mumbling that he didn't do anything. During the class Joel had been sitting silently at another table looking at his questions. He put his head down on his desk. Fred, who has finished, got up to change the rap tape.

"Tyson's only going to be found guilty because he's a black man," Joel said apparently to no one in particular.

"They're going to get him and it won't be fair," Scott says in an angry voice. Alan glanced from one to the other with what looked to be confused interest. Then he looked at Jean to see what she would do. Jean was working with Jimmy. When she looked up to ask Joel to explain what he meant, Jimmy shuffled his papers together, jumped up and says, "Come on, Alan, it's time to go." Alan mechanically began to get his papers together. Mary said quietly, "You still have five minutes."

"No we have to go, now. Alan, come on."

(They have a meeting in preparation for the Special Olympics.)

Alan got up and looked from Mary to Jimmy. Jean told Scott that he must get to work and told Jimmy that he knew it was not time to go yet. He continued to stand. Alan sat down.

Scott slammed his books and said, "I don't know why we have to be here. We're supposed to be in English class."

"This is English," Jean replies.

"No, it's not. We don't do anything like English. We read and have to answer these dumb questions and do writing." There is great anger in his voice.

"What is English?" Jean asked in a voice of quiet interest.

"English is when the teacher writes words on the board, you look them up, write down the meanings, and then you put them in sentences. Then at the end of the week you have a test on what they mean," replied Scott.

Jean looked over at me. Jimmy and Alan leave the room. Everyone begins to shove papers back into their folders and put pencils into their huge bag of books. The bell rang and the muffled sound of feet and voices began in the hall. Louis shoved Fred on the way out. Jean said, "Don't," and they immediately walk properly. Jean sat down at her desk for a moment, then realized the folders must still be put away. Mary smiled and said, "Goodbye. See you tomorrow," to me.

### A Sunny Day and A Table - Section I

The day was sunny. Students in Section I came into the room and sat down quietly. Jean handed out their folders, and they began to work. They were sitting separately and were interested in finishing their assignments. Jean circulated among the students and then asked me if I would like to help Joel who was writing a letter on the computer. The letter was important to him for he was explaining inequities in society and ways in which they might be addressed. He was uncertain to whom he might send the letter, but he thought maybe to the mayor whom he said his mother knew and maybe to his father. (It turned out, however, that he was unsure of his father's address and did not know how to obtain it.) We worked on the letter throughout the period. He became increasingly interested in his work as he began to see that he would have a product. At one point the computer would not print and Joel figured out the problem and fixed the computer/printer connection. When we were finished, Joel gave the letter to Jean to proofread. She pointed out a couple of changes which she felt could be made and then praised Joel for his efforts and the resultant letter which she told him should have some influence on those who read it. Joel seemed somewhat pleased, although he did not show much of a reaction, either verbally or non-verbally.

The rest of the class had continued to work on their assignments. Mary had helped Alan and one other student. Jean had also been called over by Jimmy, who said he could not find the answer to one of the questions. Matt, who had been sitting alone, proclaimed that he was all done with his work and looked very proud. Jean explained to the class what Joel had been doing and suggested that they might be interested in doing something like that. They listened and went back to their work. Jason asked Mary to correct his comprehension paper so that he could check the assignment off on his assignment sheet and write down his mark. She was pleased when he got an A and Mary congratulated him.

When the class left, Jean, Mary and I discussed how well the day had gone and what a pleasure it had been to see Joel do so well. Then Jean asked me if I wanted to go to the woodworking shop and look at the chair which Jimmy was working on. She explained to me that Jimmy had needed money to finish his Driver Education course. She had made an agreement with him that if he finished three pieces of furniture which she needed redone, she would give him an amount of money which would be enough to pay for the rest of the course. She had not been optimistic that he would stick to the task, but she wanted to give him the opportunity both to complete a job and to earn the money so that he would be able to finish with Driver

Education. Jimmy's father had been in agreement with the idea.

Jimmy was to show Jean the finished chair that day. The chair had needed several layers of paint stripped and sanding done and then a polyurethane finish applied. As we wended our way through the woodworking machinery in the vocational center, in order to reach the painting room, Jimmy and the chair, Jean told me that she had been in the paint shop with him several times and so had an idea of how his work was progressing. She was both surprised and pleased, for he had been persistent and done a very fine job of refinishing it. She said that it was an old chair which she had liked because of its shape, but had decided might be too hard to refinish.

When we reached the paint shop, Jimmy was looking at the completed chair. He turned it about inspecting it from different angles. His face was expressionless. Jean and I both exclaimed over the beauty of the chair and the work which it had taken to achieve such beauty. Jimmy's face changed slightly, but I thought his face still looked blank. We asked him if he was pleased with what he had done and he said yes in a flat voice. Then Jean asked him if he would like to get paid for that project before he was done with the others. She told him that she knew that was not the agreement that they had made, but that she was so impressed with his hard work and how beautiful the

chair was that she had reconsidered and felt that he should be paid at that time. He said that he did not want to get paid until all three pieces of furniture were done. He wanted to stick to the original agreement. Jean prodded him to accept the money and told him that she had great faith that he would do the rest as well as he had done the chair. However, he still refused to take the money.

During the time we talked, he kept glancing almost furtively at the chair as though he could not believe that he had done it. Then he showed Jean what he was going to do to get started on the next piece of furniture. The bell rang and he thanked us for coming. Jean told him to think about getting paid for that job, that she would call his father and tell him the amount of money which she was paying Jimmy, as had been agreed. Again, he said that he did not want the money.

As we walked back down the hall past the noisy line of students getting a morning snack in the cafeteria, Jean commented that it would be nice if Jimmy could have more times in his life when he saw himself as accomplishing something, especially something that was done so well. She said that she was glad that this had worked out and that she had not only given him a chance to earn money, but also a chance to be successful. We ended the conversation by saying how sad it was that things like

this happened so rarely for him and also that we wished he could have said he was proud of himself, but that an expression of pride seemed to be just too big a risk.

## Section II: Autobiographies and Syllabication:

### What to Teach

Jean had been rearranging the folders of the students in Section II when the students began to arrive. John sat at a table by himself. He had on the heavy Jean jacket which he had recently received for a present and which he wore every day during class. He had a gold earring dangling from one ear. His long, dark, wavy hair was thick and hung to his shoulders. When he sat at the table, he was usually slightly hunched over. His hair hung a little over his face. Darlene swaggered into the room. She had on jeans and a heavy jacket which she often wore. She smiled at Jean. Karen sat alone at another table. She had on a sweater and jeans. Her hair was clipped short. She had an expression on her face which always made me think she was waiting to see which expression she was expected to wear that day.

Todd, Darlene and Beth sat at another long table-- one on the end and the other two half-way down one side. Beth asked asking Todd how his day was going. Her stark prettiness was hidden by her long, dark hair which always fell across half of her face. Todd looked disgruntled as



he answered to her, but he grinned when she teased him about something which had happened in a previous class. He was sliding around a gym bag which was at his feet and which was filled with books which he carried around every day. Beth had her notebook out and a pencil. Todd had nothing in front of him, although he had unzipped the gym bag. Darlene took out a book from her knapsack and began to read.

Gail, the paraprofessional, came in and sat down with Karen. She said hi to her and Karen gave a half smile and sort of bowed her head.

Jean greeted everyone and asked how they were doing. Todd didn't reply, but watched her. Beth started talking about the long discussion she had had with her boy friend the night before about whether they should be serious. She said she had been upset and couldn't sleep the night before. She wanted to have a sort of serious relationship, but she said her mother kept warning her that that would interfere with her future. Her mother reminded her that although she was 16, she was only a freshman and needs to finish high school and college. Jean seemed to become slightly frustrated with the talk and told Beth that the class needed to begin work.

Amy arrived. She was strikingly pretty. She came into to the room about five minutes late. She said that she was late for school and missed the first class of the

day. She complained that her sister and her mother were lazy, that she had to do all of the work in the house and that her mother wouldn't wake her up to see that she got to school. Jean reminded her that she could only miss so much school or school rules will cause her to fail her subjects and eventually lose credits. She told Jean that she liked her class and was glad she was able to come to it. She said she didn't like all of school, but she'd rather be in school than out of school. She swung her hair, struck a pose and listened while Jean explained what the class would do for the period. Karen had continued to sit quietly at her table with Gail and John sat at his.

Jean explained that they were going to finish reading the autobiographies that they had written and then work on their folder assignments which involved a reading system which they have been working on since the beginning of the year. Jean requested that they all sit at a table together. They all moved to the table with Todd, Beth and Amy. I might have been seen as an intruder, since their writings were personal. However, they hardly seem to notice my presence. Beth read her piece, which was quite humorous. She was descriptive and lively in her discussion of several incidents in which she has had some prank-playing with her siblings. The stories were funny

and she seemed to enjoy sharing them. Todd smiled and listened, as do the others.

Jean then asked Todd if he could share his story. He shrugged and shuffled his papers. Then he began to read a story in which he had done a chronological recounting of his life. The story began when he lived with his mother. Then, he explained, she was unable to take care of him and so he went to a series of foster homes. He stopped during his story to explain that he thought he had been in 15 so far. While reading his autobiography, he recounted that he sometimes becomes confused when he tries to remember where he was when he went to school in various grades. He said the towns all run together and he can't remember what family he was living with. He didn't seem to be upset while he was telling his story, just genuinely confused about the events and places and people. He seemed a little embarrassed about the fact that his memory was not more clear, but not about explaining his life. Everyone else in the room sat attentively. His story did not seem to focus on any specific events, but rather seemed like a recounting of a series of moves.

When he was finished Beth said that he did a good job and that she had liked hearing his story. Amy nodded in agreement. Karen and John sat quietly. Jean commented that it must be hard to have to move around so frequently and to have to get to know so many families. Todd

shrugged and said something that you get used to it. He said that he liked where he was at the time and that there was a basketball hoop in the driveway and he could use it every day.

Gail thanked all for sharing their stories. Jean handed out their folders and asked them to look on their assignment sheet and decide what they should be working on. (The sheet had a list of assignments for the week.) They took out their sheets and all began to work on either a reading section on syllabication or the system reading passages. At one point Jean went to the blackboard and re-explained the syllabication rule on which they were working. The class listened intently and participated when she requested examples.

I asked Todd if he wanted some help and he covered his paper and said that he could do it himself. "It's boring," he muttered angrily. He grumbled and stared at the table. He waited several minutes before looking back at his paper.

Beth and Amy both began to work immediately. Beth was methodical about her approach to her work. She organized her papers. Then she read through the directions and questioned Jean about what to do. Amy also began to work. Karen and Gail went to another table and Karen began to read out loud the passages on which she has been working. She didn't miss any of the words. Her

reading was fluent. When Gail asked her questions at the end of the passage, she was able to answer none of them.

At this point, Todd asked no one in particular what he was supposed to do. Jean went over and worked with him on the list of words. He was able to read some, but became angry when she corrected him on any of the pronunciations. She patiently explained to him what the words meant and put them in the context of a sentence. Each time she did that, he exclaimed that he already knew what the word was.

I moved to the table where John was working. He was working on a passage which was about a grade four level. He used his finger to move from word to word. He read at an excessively slow rate. In fact, the passages seemed impossibly difficult for him. Nevertheless, he persisted without comment or complaint. I asked him if I could help. He nodded and moved the book so that I could see the passage. At that time the bell rang. The students gathered their things. Jean and Gail wished them a good day and they moved to the hall. Jean put their folders in her desk and began to organize her papers from the class. As she did so, another group of students came into her room. They were speaking loudly and two of them were having an argument. Another teacher arrived and angrily admonished them to end the discussion. Jean quickly gathered her paper work and moved to the teacher's room,

since her room was used by another teacher during that period every day. Gail had left to go to her next assignment which was as a tutor in an assisted study setting.

Jean and I talked for a few minutes about what had transpired in the class. We discussed how overwhelming the autobiographies were and how difficult it was to want to express the idea that they had some hard times without seeming to be pitying. She also commented that some of the students had chosen to focus only on the happier times which they had had, although they also had many difficult ones which they could have reported.

She said that she didn't know what to do with the autobiographies. She was pleased that they wrote so much, since it was difficult to get some of them to write at all. However, they were filled with misspellings and faulty construction. She was torn between wanting them to write a corrected piece and understand their mistakes and the desire not to quell the enthusiasm for writing which this project seemed to have elicited. She said she was going to think about it. She felt they were finally beginning to learn the rules of syllabication and for the most part to be able to read the reading program passages with good comprehension. She commented that she felt pleased because she was seeing progress in their reading skills.

Last Days/The Final Projects - Sections I and II

As an alternative to a typical final exam, Jean had decided to give the students a final project. Her decision was made in part because of difficulties which the students had had with the mid-semester exams. For a final project, the students were expected to answer questions about White Fang and also choose a project. (They had just finished reading an edited version as a class.) The project consisted of many choices including making a newsletter from the era, doing an interview with a character, rewriting the story, answering questions which the teacher had chosen. Jean was quite enthusiastic about these options. She had had some questions about the validity of her mid-term exam and she felt that these options would allow the students to have a more interactive learning experience and also possibly put them in less jeopardy.

Jean carefully went over the project options three weeks before they were due. The students made their choices. They were given seven days in class to work on the projects. Jean was available for some of the time in order to help. (She had end of the year meetings which she was obligated to attend during some of the classes.) Her paraprofessional was available during all of the class periods.

In Section I, the final projects were not all that Jean had hoped for. Alan, with the help of Mary, had created a newspaper of the times. It was beautifully put together. The sections had been planned by Mary and Alan and written up by Mary. There were pictures at the bottom of the page. Alan was asked to make a choice about who should read the paper. Jean and Mary decided that Alan would then be responsible for reading the captions of the pictures. Alan read all but one caption. Both Jean and Mary listened attentively and then praised him. The other three students looked away throughout his presentation.

Matt had stopped coming to class and had been assigned to the alternative school for the next year. Dan did not show up on the day that he was to present his final project. He had left school after showing a note from his Dad stating that he should be allowed to be dismissed. Jason said that he had left his project, a poster, in the classroom, but he could find it nowhere. Corey had done a poster which consisted of beautifully colored stenciled letters with words related to the topic of Alaska, but had not been able to find all of the pictures which went with the topics. He was also unable to say more than a few words about his poster. Joel had made a poster with a few pictures depicting aspects of the book. He was eloquent when he began to speak and explain the pictures which he had found.



When Jean stated that she was not pleased with the effort that had gone into the projects, Corey stated that he would not be coming to the class next year anyway. Jason put his head down. Todd started talking to himself and said that he would not get a "B" but at least he should be able to get a "D-." It wasn't as though he had done nothing. All he had to do, anyway, was to pass the class and with his other grades for the semester, he reflected, he should be able to do that.

After the projects were given, Jean stated that they were unacceptable, that she had given them plenty of time in class to do them, and that she was therefore expecting them to come the next day to take their originally scheduled final (of which the project was to take the place). Joel was irate. He said that you could not change a deal like that. He said he had other plans for the next day and he didn't have transportation. Jason didn't say anything. Jean said that she would be speaking with his mother later in the day during a meeting regarding this new plan. Corey stated that he would not come. Jean told Alan that it would not be necessary for him to take the final. He looked very serious and nodded.

After that there was silence at the table where the students sat. Then they got up and began pacing in front of the door in anticipation of the end of the period.

Jean seemed committed to her action and Mary commented something to the effect that the students needed to understand that expectations had not been met. Jean reflected on the fact that she had not been present to give them help during all of the time. She wondered if she was, therefore, partly to blame for their problems. (Three of the students did return the next day to make up their finals. Jean related that she was glad that she had made such a demand and that the students had followed through. She also said that the experience had made her think that she wished she had assigned more projects during the year, so that she could have helped the students to work more independently on such things.)

When considering the results of the final projects in Section II, more positive results were seen. The projects for Section II were, in general, very good. The students were invested in the work, had made choices which were viable and challenging and were proud of the products which they saw evolving. Beth chose to answer specific questions regarding the story. Beth was proud of her writing ability and proud of the writing progress which she had made during the year. John had chosen to rewrite the story, a task of great challenge for him. John explained to me that he had chosen this project because it was easier for him to write than to read. He said that when he wrote he could just "throw out all of the words

which he didn't know." Other students had projects which were of equal interest.

These students exhibited pride in their work and had an amount of concentration in their efforts. Their final projects were in many ways reflections of their year. During the year they had made a commitment to improving their reading and writing abilities and had asked for and received help. Within Section II there was a sense of productivity and a feeling of shared learning.

In the next part of this dissertation, I will present Case Studies of four of the students in Sections I and II. I derived the information in the Case Studies from my observations of the students and my discussions with teachers and paraprofessionals about these students. I also interviewed the students formally and informally and reviewed their special education folders.

### Case Studies

#### Beth

Beth was a 16 year old freshman. She was one of the students grouped together by her eighth grade resource room teacher because they worked well together and were interested in their studies. Of the students whom I observed, I found it easiest to engage with Beth. She was loquacious and social. Although she was sometimes moody and her moodiness spilled over and altered her classroom

performance and interactions, she was often the one who sought out other students and adults and asked how they were doing. She seemed genuinely interested in their lives and freely shared many of the happenings in hers. Sometimes her talk disrupted the work of the class and was counterproductive to the teacher's goals and to the her concentration and that others. Nevertheless, I found her openness appealing and her ability to reflect on what was happening to her and others around her to be in sharp contrast to the apparent lack of reflection which I found in most of the other students.

I also found Beth to talk of school events more than other students and to sound as though she felt herself to be part of the school culture. While I rarely heard other students speak about interactions with classmates or attending class events, Beth frequently related what was happening with her friends and school events in which she was participating, particularly chorus. Beth also talked about her aspirations and the aspirations which her mother had for her. These included college and a way to be trained for a job which would be a "good" job and which she would enjoy.

Beth seemed to be influenced by the ideas of her mother, although she did not agree with her at all times. Nevertheless, she is the only student who seemed to frequently refer to a parent in a way which reflected such

influence. For example, when students in the class did free choice reading, Beth brought a book which she said her mother had recently finished reading. It was a fairly difficult book, and though I wondered whether she was able to read it, she appeared interested and read it with attentiveness. When I asked her about the story, the details were scant.

Beth also talked about decorating her room by painting it and picking out new accessories. When I asked her if she was interested in being an interior decorator, she looked confused as though she either did not know what I meant, or could not picture herself in such a role. Her reaction to that comment made me wonder whether there was a vagueness to her plans for her future which might not have been present in many others her age. By this I mean that she had aspirations which in many ways reflected those which her mother had for her, but there was a sense that no one knew for certain how one went about achieving such goals. Beth did say that she wanted to go to college and her mother also wanted her to go. She explained to me that she was of part Indian ancestry and so her mother was trying to find documentation of this so that she could obtain a college scholarship set aside for those of such descent. When I asked her how she was going about this, she didn't seem to know.

According to Beth's records, she was referred for help when she was in Developmental Kindergarten. Her intellectual assessment using a Slosson Test of Intellectual Development placed her in the Average range of intelligence. A speech and language evaluation revealed both expressive and receptive language delays. An Occupational Therapy examination given at this time indicated that she had visual perceptual difficulties and that her attention span was short. She was identified as having a learning disability at the end of that year and placed in a self-contained classroom during the next year to receive help in these skill areas. Beth remained in a self-contained classroom through grade three. At that time she repeated grade three in a regular classroom and remained in regular classrooms with resource room help as well as speech and language help until grade seven. Records indicate that in grade seven she was in a departmentalized program with special education classes in English, math, reading and science.

Subsequent intellectual assessments using the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R) placed Beth in the Low Average range and the Low end of the Average range with little difference between Verbal and Performance (non-verbal) scores. On the most recent WISC-R testing, the examiner noted that the test results

indicated that Beth had a strength in visual memory and a weakness in school and reading-related information.

Beth's scores on the Peabody Individual Achievement Test, which was given yearly, indicated achievement levels of two to three years below expected age levels with reading comprehension scores below the first percentile until the age of 8-8, at which time it was reported to be at the third percentile for her age. The most recent testing, reported in grade six at age 13, indicated third grade level achievement in both reading and math. On a Durrell Analysis of Reading given during the same year, Beth received scores on Oral and Silent reading of grade four, and Word Recognition and Word Analysis skills of grade two and three respectively.

Beth's most recent language evaluation given in grade seven indicated good pragmatic and conversational skills. She received a Standard Score of 70 on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test which placed her in the Moderately Low range. The report stated that, "Conversations with her teachers indicate language needs being addressed in class," and also state, "Her desire to remain in mainstream classes and move with her peers should be noted." Recommendations for high school stated during a meeting at the end of grade eight indicated that Beth should remain in mainstream classes with resource room help for reading and math.

The course which Beth and her mother had designed for her future was different from that which had been taken by others in her family and by her friends. It seemed that no one else in her family had been to college upon high school graduation. Beth's friend, who was about her age, was married during the school year in which I observed. There was considerable conflict involved in Beth's mother's thoughts about Beth's relationship with her boyfriend, who was older than Beth and out of high school and working. Beth spoke often about her mother's concern that she was too serious about her boyfriend, particularly since she was only a freshman. Beth, who was aware that she was chronologically older than most freshmen, was frustrated by her mother's concern. However, she also talked about the fact that she had spoken with her boyfriend about the fact that she had goals and their relationship could not get in the way. Her boyfriend seemed to understand and not find that there was a conflict.

Beth was the only one of the students who brought things from home in order to contribute to the class. For example, she was able to occasionally bring in books when choice reading was part of the classroom curriculum. When the teacher wished to show a video, Beth said that her mother had a collection of videos and offered to look to see whether they owned the one which Jean wished to show.



Beth was open about her work. It was my impression that she was organized and motivated to accomplish her assignments and do well. When class began and students were asked to begin folder work, Beth would almost always take out her assignment and attempt to begin. However, although the assignments were often similar in nature and followed sequentially in the books related to the program in which the students were working, Beth often asked for help in figuring out what she was supposed to do. At first I wondered whether her questions were a way to get attention; however, I came to believe that they were not. It was unclear to me whether Beth's frequent need for help when beginning her work was the result of insecurity about starting without an explanation or the result of genuine confusion about the nature of the assignment and an indication of her difficulty in associating past learning with present learning.

Once Beth got started, she was attentive, persistent and independent in completing the assigned tasks. She usually completed daily assignments with success, whether they required reading, paragraph writing or exercises involving syllabication. However, when Beth took a mid-term exam which was to count quite heavily toward her course grade, she received a very low mark which did not seem to be indicative of her daily work. Both Beth and Jean speculated on the reasons and wondered how much

anxiety had played a part. However, the possibility also existed that there simply had been little long-term carry-over related to Beth's successful daily work.

Beth would often ask me for help when she was having difficulty on an aspect of an assignment. She was willing to be helped, though I did not find her particularly dependent once she got started on her work. She was only infrequently defensive about her learning problems, although she became somewhat upset when she received a low grade or score. On one occasion we worked together in the room across the hall, because other students were working on reading, an assignment which Beth found distracting. Beth was working on an assignment which required her to read a page long passage and then summarize the passage using a structure which was established by the reading program in which she was working. Beth read the passage aloud, and only needed help on a couple of words which she had pronounced incorrectly. I found her reading to be fluent and that she read with confidence. (The passage was at approximately a fourth/fifth grade level.) She then began to summarize the passage using the formula required. I did not understand the directions indicating how to summarize and actually misled Beth with my explanations. She politely corrected me and went about finishing the summarizing, which she did adequately. She then read her paragraph to me and responded with pride

when I praised her work. She expressed her belief that her reading and writing had improved and that she was gaining in overall abilities. She said that attendance in Jean's class helped her to improve her work, as her resource room reading class had during the previous year. She commented that she was glad that she was in the class because she liked Jean, as she had very much liked her teacher from the past year and that the class was a comfortable place to be.

In my opinion, Beth's reading seemed to have improved to a level greater than the scores which she received when she was tested in the sixth grade. I would have placed her reading ability around a sixth grade level. I found that she had a solid sight vocabulary and knew how to apply rules of phonics in order to sound out new words. She read fluently and her literal and inferential comprehension was good at approximately the fifth and sixth grade levels. Her vocabulary knowledge seemed weak. This was possibly the result of limited exposure to higher level reading materials and a spoken vocabulary which was less extensive than the average person of her age. She was, however, often able to figure out the meanings of words from context. If she had difficulty with this, she would ask someone in the room to help her with the word or sometimes look it up in the dictionary.

Beth seemed to enjoy reading and to see it as something done both for pleasure and to gain knowledge. I found her attentive and focused when she read even when materials were difficult for her. She particularly liked to think about the characteristics of the people in fiction and non-fiction which she read. As mentioned above, one of the reasons which she seemed to value reading was the fact that her mother read frequently and expressed enjoyment in her reading.

As samples of Beth's written language indicate, Beth used a more limited selection of vocabulary than many students of her age might use. (See Figures 2 and 3.) Some of her grammar was faulty and she had difficulty expanding on ideas. However, Beth liked to write and would sustain attention on written assignments independently longer than any of the other students in the sections. She indicated that she saw writing as a tool for expressing her ideas, both relative to personal thoughts and academic assignments.

It was my impression that with practice she would make continued improvement in her written language skills. Although Beth's spelling was probably not at grade level, she was willing to attempt to spell words and edit her work later (rather than halting whenever spelling became a problem). She also liked to type and enjoyed utilizing the computer to do her written work.

Figure 2

sample of Beth's Work Using Marketed Program

OUTLINE/PARAGRAPH FORM

"A Suicide doctor is going to jail if he doesn't stop."

TOPIC

DETAILS

Parin This Doctor is telling People <sup>who</sup> that are feeling Pain they should kill them selves. Lawmakers want to stop Dr. Jack Levorlian from assisting in <sup>any</sup> more suicides, Jack Keverkian: Has assisted in three just last week. <sup>law makers</sup> - Saye "its just a matter of time" before the doctor defies the ban <sup>propose</sup> Michigan Governor John Engler Signed legislation yesterday afternoon that <sup>immediately</sup> bans assisted suicides. <sup>in Michigan</sup>

CONCLUSION well I don't think it is alright in some ways.

## Figure 3

Sample of Beth's Work:  
Assigned Writing Project

## THE DAY BEFORE

## GETS MARRIED

Today after school I have to go home and babysit my sister's three kids. I only have to babysit till 5:30 pm. When I am done babysitting, me and my mom are going out to get my best friend - a wedding gift. After I get her gift me and my mom have to go and pick up my dress for the wedding because I am in 's wedding.

Around 8:00 pm tonight there might be a wedding rehearsal, that is when me and the other two bridesmaids have to know what to do the day of the wedding. The other two bridesmaids' names are and , they are two good friend's of mine. I can't wait till friday the day of the wedding when get's married. I am so happy for her and .

Beth's approach to her work was concrete, although she seemed to be beginning to approach learning on a more abstract level. Her dependency on others seemed to result from this concreteness which sometimes made it difficult for her to transfer what she had learned to new situations. She also had some difficulty when the format changed, requiring specific directions, rather than being able to decide what was required from written directions. Although this concreteness probably interfered with her learning, as did her deficient vocabulary and below age level reading skills, I felt that Beth was actively engaged in her learning and making steady progress. She saw reading and writing skills as important and used them as part of her every day life, in most cases with some measure of success.

#### Interview

Beth was glad to be interviewed. She spoke without hesitation about the subjects which were raised. My conversation with Beth was different from my conversations with other students because her thoughts and ideas about her life reflected her belief in the fact that she had made academic progress and was a high school student who was more mature than many her age. My conversation with Beth was also different from those with other students because her discussion was filled with references to others in her life who supported her and with whom she

spent much time talking over thoughts and feelings. Finally, it was different because Beth had confidence in herself (though at times it was shaky) and she had many plans for the future. Beth conversed with me as though she thought of us as two adults having a conversation. At one point, after she had asked me about my schooling, she was encouraging and supportive of my efforts, telling me that she was sure that I would be able to succeed and finish my degree.

When I asked Beth about her early life, she explained to me that some of it was, as she called it, "blacked out," but she said that she knew of many of the happenings because she talked about events in her childhood with her older sister and with her mother. My sense throughout the conversation was that Beth felt valued by the people who were significant in her life and that she felt that they had always been there to support her. She also saw the females in her family as strong people who had faced some adversity, but moved forward and made successful lives for themselves. She saw these women (and her father) as concerned for her future and hoping that she would benefit from an understanding of decisions which had made their lives difficult. She seemed to feel that they expressed caring in taking the time to talk with her about their lives in an attempt to make hers easier.



When I asked Beth about her early schooling, she said that school had been difficult for her when she was very young and that during her earliest school years she had had little confidence.

"I did have a negative attitude back in grade school. I had a problem. Like I'd say, 'I'm never going to do it. I can't do this. I can't do that. I'm so stupid.' I had to deal with (names first school she went to)."

Beth went on to explain that she had trouble in that school because she had difficulty with her work and the teachers would just give her the answer, instead of letting her try to sound out words for herself or work to figure out a math problem. She said that teachers should explain to you how to do things, and help you work through them. They should never just give you the answers. She said that one of the teachers she had said she was learning disabled and that was why she couldn't do her work. Beth explained that she didn't know what that meant, at the time, but that she felt stupid because she had the feeling that the teacher felt she was incapable and that was the end of it. That made her feel stupid. Beth recounted that she went home and told her parents, and that her mother believed her and took her to the principal so that the three of them could talk about what was happening, but the principal didn't seem to be about to take care of the matter. Then, she said, her mother

"took her right out of that school" (and put her in another school in the city). After that she said she loved her teachers because they explained things to her and let her try to get the answers. Beth stated that she had had resource room help and that she had really liked that because she could tell she was making progress. She also remembered the many awards she had received in that school for things like attendance and good behavior. She expressed the wish that she could have gone back to her teachers in the first school and told them that she wasn't stupid and that she was doing well in school, despite what they had thought of her.

Beth said that she didn't like teachers who were boring and who just had you do page after page of workbooks. She said then you stopped trying because you were bored. She stated that she liked Jean's class because Jean was nice and a good teacher who helped you. She felt the resource room class was helping her to progress. She also said that she liked her English class because the teacher was a really good teacher, and she made learning fun. Beth explained that it was important that teachers make students obey rules, like being polite, but that if you had to enforce a rule, you should never humiliate the student in front of others because then the student would not respect you and wouldn't do anything you say.

Beth talked about the importance of her friends in her life. She explained that she had many conversations with them. She explained that many of them were marrying, or had married at ages as young as 15 and 16. She seemed to wish them well, but not want the same for herself, since she foresaw the difficulties which they might encounter. When she talked about her friends, she said that she viewed herself as someone in whom they confided, and as a person who could be of help to them. Beth related that her friends often thanked her for her help and that she believed they saw her as an important person in their lives. She related that their praise helped her to have confidence in herself.

I knew that Beth planned to go to college. I asked her what had made her interested in going to college.

"Well, my mom mostly because, um, she's always saying, 'You should go to college, you know.' And she told me all the good things about college and that if you don't go to college, there's bad things about it, but you never know. And plus I just want to go so I can have a great education and eventually get a good job, because I don't want to work at (names local recreation spot where she has a summer job) all my life. That kind of job can get boring and it doesn't pay very much. Plus, if you want a house, and a family eventually, you can't be working at that kind of job for the rest of your

life. ...I'd like to go to college for like reading and writing, 'cause I'm good at that. (laughs) Or I like working with people. I'm good working with people."

Later in the interview, Beth explained that she was not always confident, but that when she wasn't feeling confident she would think about the fact that she had made progress in school (which she said she knew because of the level of work which she was doing--for example when she looked at the way she was reading and writing, she could see it was improved) and she would think about the fact that she was important to her friends. She said that she kept telling herself, "Think positive, Beth. Think positive," and that helped, too.

### Todd

Todd was a 16 year old freshman who had been in a special education program since first grade. In that program he had attended some self-contained academic classes and regular non-academic classes as well as regular science and social studies classes. Upon entering high school, he was placed in lower track classes with a resource room reading class. He had been specifically grouped by his eighth grade special education teacher so that he could attend reading class with other students who were considered to be cooperative and interested in learning.

Todd's records indicated that he has undergone a good deal of intellectual, academic and psychological testing throughout his school career. When Todd was in grade one, he was referred for a speech and language evaluation which indicated that he was consistently performing below age level in all areas of language development. The examiner did not recommend language services for Todd since he was to be placed in a self-contained classroom which was smaller and language-oriented.

Todd was identified as having a learning disability when he was in the first grade. At that time he was placed in a self-contained special education classroom. He continued in this program through grades two and three. At the end of grade three, Todd was also identified as having an emotional handicap. For the next four years his education took place in a self-contained classroom with an emphasis on behavior management. During his eighth grade year, Todd attended special education classrooms for academic subjects except for science and social studies.

Todd had received several IQ tests since he began school. His most recent IQ test, the Wechsler Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R), administered when he was in grade eight, yielded IQ scores which were in the Low Average range. There was no significant difference between his Verbal and Performance IQ scores. These scores were generally consistent with previous scores

which fluctuated from the Low Average range to the low end of the Average Range. On most recent testing, Todd demonstrated difficulty going from part to whole on visual perceptual skills. This was consistent with his performance on the Test of Visual Motor Integration on which he had difficulty copying the designs because he found it hard to organize the parts in order to draw an accurate copy. Previous IQ assessments did not indicate a pattern of weaknesses consistent with those shown during his most recent examinations.

Prior to grade eight, when Todd's most recent academic testing occurred, he was given the Peabody Individual Achievement test on a yearly basis. These scores improved from approximately the first grade to third grade level. When in grade five, his scores indicated reading and math skills at the second grade level.

Todd's most recent academic testing was administered when he was in grade eight. As part of the examination, Todd was observed during his regular education science class. The examiner noted that "Todd took notes and seemed to pay attention during a review lecture concerning ecological biomes. His behavior was totally appropriate." During this assessment Todd was given the Kaufman Test of Education Achievement. His scores were reported as standard scores and grade level scores. Todd received

standard scores of between 60 and 65 (.47-1st percentile). When interpreted as grade levels, Todd's score on both Reading Decoding and Comprehension tests were at the grade four level. The examiner reported that at this level Todd showed good reading strategies. She also indicated that his scores were significantly lower than might be expected when compared to his levels of intellectual functioning. On the math subtests Todd also showed grade four achievement levels. He was able to do addition and subtraction with regrouping, simple multiplication and simple division. The examiner noted that on these subtests, within his level of expertise, Todd's skills were solid and that he showed confidence in his ability to do what he was asked to do.

Todd's most recent psychological assessment was done when he was in grade seven. In reporting on previous psychological testing the examiner stated that past evaluations had noted that Todd projected needs that were basic and physical--that he needed immediate physical gratification, showed poor anger control, acted quickly and impulsively with a tendency toward aggressiveness. He was described as having "a lot of anxiety with a low frustration tolerance" (1985). In 1988 testing indicated that he did not have good control over his impulses and his Rorschach indicated that his basic safety and nurturance needs were not being met. He acted based on

how he felt, rather than by using his cognitive skills to make well thought out decisions. He felt isolated and rejected by others and was likely to be explosive. The present examiner noted that "his home life, which is well documented elsewhere in his file, has been quite disruptive." (Todd was placed in foster care during his first years in school and has been in many foster homes. Several times his mother has tried to have Todd returned to live with her, but disruptive situations occurred and he was returned to foster care.)

During the most current assessment (grade seven), the examiner noted that Todd was cooperative and pleasant. Rorschach responses at the time of this examination indicated that there was a limited chance that Todd's responses were still being distorted by his emotions. He also was much more likely to think through a problem rather than respond emotionally as he had done in the past. These test interpretations were considered by the examiner to indicate considerable progress. Nevertheless, the examiner noted that Todd's test interpretations showed that he was still dealing with a good deal of inner pain and that he was still emotionally fragile and because his aspirations often exceeded his abilities, he was often angry at himself.

At the time of the current assessment, Todd continued to blame himself for family problems (although the



situations were out of his control), although at this time he did feel more accepted by adults and peers. He did not exhibit the needy sense that his nurturance requirements were not being met. In summarizing Todd's most recent psychological testing, the examiner noted that while testing indicated that Todd was still in pain and vulnerable to acting out his negative feelings, he had made satisfactory progress over the years. The examiner recommended that his educational program include a supportive component to allow for continued growth.

I found it difficult to assess Todd's academic abilities because he spent so much time hiding his work. His reading seemed to be around the third/fourth grade level. When he read aloud, his reading was often dysfluent. While Todd knew how to apply phonics, his limited spoken vocabulary often hindered him from correctly pronouncing a word which was unfamiliar to him. He didn't always use the context to help him figure out the meaning of words when he was reading. His reading comprehension was inconsistent. On some days he was only able to answer literal questions; on other days he was able to be quite abstract. Todd seemed to dislike reading, partly because it was difficult for him, and partly because he was embarrassed by his poor skills. For these reasons, he really practiced his reading and when he did he was not always focused.

Todd's writing samples were labored and he often had difficulty translating ideas which he presented orally to paper. (See Figures 4 and 5.) He sometimes wrote, as he spoke, in short phrases rather than in sentences. Todd disliked writing as much, if not more than, reading. He avoided it for the same reasons that he avoided reading. The humiliation which Todd felt regarding his reading/writing abilities, plus his often disrupted life, caused him to avoid practice in reading and writing. He was often unfocused when he could bring himself to engage in these tasks. Consequently, Todd appeared to make little progress.

Todd always entered the resource room carrying, or more accurately dragging, a huge gym bag filled with books and paper and pencils. He often wore a bracelet of small beads which is often associated with the sixties. He was neatly dressed and conscious of his dress, often looking to make sure his shirt was tucked in and his sweater or sweatshirt hung straight. Sometimes he exchanged the beaded necklace for a striking medallion. It always seemed that Todd sat at the end of a table, sort of making contact, but never contact that was too close. Although he usually chose not to sit directly next to anyone, he always seemed aware of his fellow students and appeared to wait for someone to make contact with him. When this happened, he was responsive, though sometimes there was a

Figure 4  
Sample of Todd's Work Using Marketed Program

OUTLINE/PARAGRAPH FORM  
60 GIVE ME  
 the TOPIC MARINES Fight A Five hour Fire battle  
 IN SOMALIA.  
DETAILS  
 with Grenades! Shocking At US Marines  
 killed One Of The Warlords have  
 Surrendered To The Americans.

CONCLUSION  
 I think It's great That we are  
 up in Somalia.

Figure 5

Sample of Todd's Work: Assigned Writing Project

3/2/93 Chapter 9  
 They all ~~the~~ Finley get  
 some food but it's not  
 enough to hold them.  
 When they all get  
 done eating ~~the~~ Peter  
 goes back into his own  
 world. He thinks about  
 his old girl friend he  
 misses her, ~~but~~ that's  
 here he gets away  
 from stairs and the noise  
 of every body fighting.

---

3/8/93 The Food machine  
 starts up again  
 but no food comes out  
 This time, Blossom  
 feels like she is in hell.  
 Nothing but white around them.



a half-veiled cynical defensiveness to the response. He often mumbled and looked away or down when he was speaking; however, he would quickly allow himself to be drawn into any conversation. An edgy fragileness pervaded his being. His fellow classmates seemed to be used to his responses and not at all put off by them. Possibly they had known him long enough to trust him.

Todd had many physical complaints, frequently asking to go to the nurse with a headache, a hurt finger, or a sore leg. He was usually allowed to go and would return to class after a few minutes, explain any prescription for his ailment, and periodically rub the hurt part of his body during class. This manner of acting also seemed to go unnoticed by his classmates as though they were used to it. When Todd was given specific attention because of an ailment or told that maybe he should leave the class until he felt better, he would shrug and say that he would be OK. It seemed that being part of this small group was very important to Todd. In contradiction to his sometimes sulky and remote demeanor, he often would be the one who would go out of his way to draw Tim into conversations, when Tim had removed himself from the rest of the class. It was also Todd who initiated friendship between Tim and himself, although he, at first, received little response from Tim. Todd would often tease Beth and Amy about their

boyfriends or their new clothes in a friendly and accepting way.

Todd once stated during the class sharing time that the ability to have friends meant everything to him. He said that was why he came to school and the reason that he had learned to walk away from people who tried to make trouble with him in the school halls. He said he thought there was an "in" crowd at school which he wasn't part of, but that was OK with him, though he did not like to be made fun of and he was very upset when he saw that happen to others. He said he knew what it was like and how bad you could feel, but that he didn't have the status (in the community of students) to do much about it. During the same conversation he switched to talking about his most recent foster home. He talked about the fact that when he got home (a home which was in a town outside of his school district since he was in a special school placement), he was able to play basketball with his step-brother, because there was a hoop right in the driveway. He said he felt happy when he was doing that. This seemed to be very important to him in the context of the whole conversation, as though he had found a place which was secure at home, even when he felt some insecurity in the halls of the school.

Todd seemed to relate in somewhat the same way, but possibly with a bit more constraint, with the teachers in

this setting. He appeared fond of both Jean and Mary, the paraprofessional who worked with Section II, and as though it was important to him that he see them every day. He engaged with them in the same, almost deferent, way that he engaged with the students, but there was an added edge when he was interacting in terms of his work. That is, he preferred to work on his own and when asked to show his work or to interact with a teacher regarding his work, the edge turned much sharper.

Todd spent a great deal of time hiding his work. He always had his arms over the edges of his papers so that it was hard to see what he was doing. He was often resistant to obtaining help, seemingly because he did not like to admit that there was anything which he was unable to do and he was highly reluctant to show what he had done, as though the product was never going to be satisfactory. When he needed help, he would often say or read words incorrectly and then when corrected say, "That's what I said" in an acrid tone of voice. The teacher and paraprofessional in the room treated Todd with what appeared to be fondness, caring and patience, often going through what looked like an elaborate game of good-natured and masterful cajoling to persuade him to work with them on difficult parts of his assignments. They seemed to have won his trust and respect in a general way, but on specific days when he was having particular



difficulty with his work, the hard edge would surface. What was surprising was that he was generally able to keep this in check as though he had long ago trained himself to do so. However, this need for constant control also seemed to take a toll in energy and lack of focus on his actual work and learning. The level of engagement was often missing when the task was difficult as though too great an engagement would carry with it too great a risk and emotional overload.

One day when Todd was having a particularly difficult time with an assignment and had put his head down for several minutes as though he had given up, I asked him if I could help. He retorted in a very angry, low voice that he did not want or need my help and that I should leave him alone. When I told him that he should not speak to me in that manner, I unleashed a geyser of response. First he said, "That's just the way I am," in a humble and almost sad voice. "You shouldn't pay attention to me when I get like this. I can't help it." He looked at me as though this all made him feel awful, but with the expectation that I would acknowledge that this was "the way he was." Then he started on a barrage of talk. He stated that he was nothing but a retard and that he should be next door in the retard room. He said that he knew that he was learning disabled and that that was OK to be, but that that was really incorrect and he might as well just face

the fact that he was in the wrong room he was so retarded. When I said that I thought he was just having a little problem with one part of the assignment, he just hung his head and stopped talking. Then he said he knew that he couldn't do it and put his head down on the papers.

Later he looked up as though inviting some type of interaction. However, when I discussed the work, he spent most of the time trying to explain to me that he knew the answers, and that he had said what I said, and so I was mistaken in correcting him or explaining anything any further. Although he finished the paper with my help, it is unlikely that he absorbed much, if any, of the information. Later he called the teacher over to help him. He was much more comfortable having her instruct him, but that feature of hiding and disengagement lingered.

On another day, I had an interaction with Todd which I found particularly indicative of another aspect of who he was. I had purchased some magazines for the other resource room section, and was showing them to Jean. They were Rock magazines. Todd saw them and became very excited and interested. He politely asked me if I would let him look at one and I handed it to him. He took it with a kind of reverence and began looking through the pictures. I looked over at Jean and then told him that if he wanted he could have it. I said that I had bought

several for a project the other class was doing, and that they didn't need them all. He said that he would just borrow it and give it back to me. When I told him that he could keep it, he seemed overwhelmed. He thanked me several times and then turned to me and said, "Where do you get these?" When I explained that I had purchased them at a store in the middle of town, he looked totally surprised and said he thought he might know where the store was, but he wasn't sure. Since he had lived in the town for more than a year (before being placed in the current foster home), I was surprised that he neither knew where the store was located, nor was aware that that was where you would purchase a magazine, considering that the magazine was of such great interest to him. Class started, and he sat down, carefully placing the magazine into his gym bag of books.

#### Interview

After my interview with Todd ended and I turned off the tape recorder, Todd picked up the recorder. He was holding a paper clip which he slid under the tape. He then ripped the tape in half. Immediately after, I tape recorded my recollections of the interview. I feel that they are accurate. Todd said he didn't know to almost everything I asked him. When I prodded him, he would give me an answer.

I asked Todd about school in the past and he said he couldn't remember anything about it. Even when I prodded him and asked about his favorite grade or one thing he could remember, he continued to say he couldn't remember anything. I asked him what school was like now. He said it was very boring and he didn't think he would stay in school except that he knew he should be in school. I asked him why, and he said he didn't know, that he just knew it.

I asked him if he was going to take Voc. Ed. courses. He said, no, he wasn't going to because he didn't like anything about school.

I asked him what he did for reading. He said that he didn't do much reading.

I asked him what he did for homework. He said he didn't have much homework, but he did it when he was going to bed. I asked him what happened if he didn't get it done and he said nothing happened.

He said teachers should be careful and not embarrass students. He said they should know about learning disabilities because lots of kids had them. (I hadn't brought the term up.) He said teachers shouldn't make kids read. He said teachers should stay after school and help you because then people wouldn't know what you couldn't do.

He said that people shouldn't be put in classes where you knew people were stupid. He said maybe, like Jean's class, but he didn't really think that was a good example, that one was OK.

I asked him if they had high and low levels of classes in the school. He said no. I asked him how you'd know whether you were in a smart or stupid class. He said you'd know because of the books you used and the people who were in the class with you. He said people shouldn't be allowed to be put in stupid classes, that was too embarrassing. You should be put in classes like everyone else.

His ideal school would be like a college. You could go from building to building, and have breaks in between classes. He thought the school should be in the city and he would like the buildings to be like houses that you went to for classes. He said he hadn't ever been to a college, but that sometimes he thought maybe he could go to one if he got a scholarship or something, but he was very vague, and said he really didn't know much about that.

I said that I remembered that he liked music. Would he like to do something with music in his life? He said that he would, but he knew not very many people got to be famous in music, so he didn't really see that as working out. Then he said he'd like to be a professional

basketball player, because he really likes basketball, but he knew that was very hard to do, too. So he didn't see that working out. He said he hadn't ever been to a basketball game in the city.

He talked about the importance of having friends and that that was why people came to school. This was very important.

He wouldn't talk about reading and writing in school, though he said that once in a while they had to write things in geography about themselves, but he didn't see what that had to do with geography.

He said that he'd learned things best if you got to go on field trips and do things like go to museums. He said you shouldn't have much reading and writing in school, but that you should do things related to your subjects. He thought it was important for people to go to school because it was important to learn things, but he didn't know what you needed to learn or why you needed to learn them.

When I asked Todd what he saw his future as being, he said he didn't see himself as having any future. He said he could see himself on the streets. I asked him why. He said he couldn't think of himself as being capable of any particular jobs.

Amy

Amy was a 14 year old freshman. She had been placed in the ninth grade during the second half of the school year after being home-schooled in lieu of her attendance in a seventh grade classroom for the first half of the year. (Amy's mother had requested that she be home schooled because of the discomfort she felt being at school. Records were not explicit about the reasons for this discomfort.) When Amy began in grade nine, a support program was set up for Amy through the high school special education department. This included placement in regular classes and a resource room reading class. This was done, both in order to help alleviate her discomfort with school and to give her academic support. Amy was frequently late or absent from school, although she said that she liked the resource room and would rather be in school than at home. She explained her tardiness and absences by saying that her mother and older sister were lazy and that she had to do everything around the house, if anything was to get done. She also said that her mother wouldn't get her up in the morning and that she often overslept.

Amy did not have as much testing in her special education folder as many other students, since she has not been identified as learning disabled in the past, and testing was being completed during the time of my research in order to identify her as having a learning disability.

Amy was given the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement in November of 1992. Amy was tested at this time at the request of her mother and the assistant superintendent of schools in order to assess her strengths and weaknesses and to give her mother help in planning Amy's home schooling. The examiner stated that Amy appeared to have little confidence in her abilities but responded to encouragement and positive comments.

Her performance indicated broad reading, math and general knowledge to be at the low end of Average. Her reading comprehension and math reasoning scores were stronger than her skills scores in these subjects.

The examiner concluded, "These results suggest that Amy has the ability to perform in the Average range and that the lower skills scores are discrepant with that ability." She also stated that observed behaviors would suggest perseveration difficulties, possible word retrieval problems, possible visual perception problems, vocabulary and language weaknesses and difficulty making connection. She suggested that Amy be tested further in order to determine the possible existence of a learning disability.

On the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R) given in March 1993, Amy obtained a Verbal score at the low end of the Average range, a



Performance test score at the high end of the Average range, and a Full Scale score of Average.

The examiner noted that there was a 15 point difference between the two scores which is significant and indicated a "real difference in the development of these modalities, a profile sometimes seen in children with learning disabilities." The examiner also evaluated the results in terms of factor indices. She indicated that discrepancy between scores seemed less so when the factor analysis was done. Amy received a score which was well below average on the factor which indicates an auditory weakness which is associated with anxiety and distractibility. She also concluded that historically Amy had lacked confidence in her ability to do well in school, and that there was reason to believe that her emotional response to a learning disability had hindered her acquisition of basic skills. She considered Amy to be a good candidate for remedial teaching in an environment which was secure and encouraging of both her completion of academic tasks and her school attendance.

What I first noticed about Amy was her striking prettiness. I first saw her when she walked into the resource room, her head down, hair swinging back and forth across her face. My impression was that she must be shy. I watched as she sat down, took out books and papers and neatly arranged them. When she looked up I saw that she

had on makeup which was tastefully applied, but noticeable. When she became aware that I was looking at her, she tilted her head down a bit, then looked up again and gave me a warm smile.

Amy always acknowledged my presence in the resource room and seemed to want to get to know me. This desire seemed to be a combination of a genuinely friendly manner and a neediness which was hard to pinpoint more definitively. She was comfortable with me and told me

that I reminded her of her aunt of whom she was fond and who she described as being sweet. Amy was self-deprecating regarding her ability to accomplish school tasks, although this deprecation did not appear to carry over into other areas of her life. She sometimes commented that she was not a good student and specifically explained that she was not a good speller and, therefore, had a lot of trouble with her written work. Since Amy was so frequently absent, she often was behind on her assignments which seemed to add to the sense of impending defeat which was part of her demeanor.

Although when I worked with Amy, she appeared embarrassed and somewhat shy about discussing her assignments, she never resisted help. When she needed

assistance, however, she required frequent interventions and prodding. Observations of her behavior in the resource room showed that Amy was willing and almost eager to have help with her work, and almost always had her papers and books well organized. She would often take her assignments out, place the papers in front of her and then seem confused or hesitant about how to begin. If an assignment was clear cut, such as syllabication of words using the same pattern, Amy would work persistently and with care. Her work was usually accurate. However, when tasks changed to be more open-ended, such as writing a story or answering open-ended questions regarding reading, Amy's approach would shift. (See Figures 6-8.) In these cases, or when assignments involved different directions for different parts, Amy would become hesitant and sit and look at the paper. There seemed to be two reasons for this. One, Amy became very insecure if what was expected was not concrete. This did not seem to be caused by an inability to understand more abstract cognitive demands, but by a need to have a model in order to assure that she was correct in her assessment of the task before beginning.

Another reason for this difficulty seemed to be her inability to switch tasks, since each switch required a new interpretation of directions and she would freeze when this was required. When assignments required written

## Figure 6

## Samples of Amy's Work from Marketed Program

## Using the Six Patterns

Words may have one, two, or several syllables. Below are words of various lengths. Decide how many syllables are in each word. Divide the words using the six pattern rules. If a word sounds odd, divide the syllables another way. Always use the six patterns.

Example: seventeen se / ven / teen That sounds odd.

seventeen sev / en / teen She is seventeen.

S e p t e m b e r

s e c o n d h a n d

b e a n

a p r o n

n o r t h e a s t e r n

t w e n t y

s e a w e e d

g o v e r n m e n t

u n d e r s t a t e

F r i d a y

i m p o r t a n t

n u m b e r i n g

o v e r s t e p

p o s t m a s t e r

p o t h o l e

o m i t t e d

## Figure 7

## Sample 1 of Amy's Work: Assigned Writing Project

4/2/93

I feel she never liked dressing up for gym because she thinks she's fat and that's why ~~she~~ the book call the Cat ate my Shoes and every time she went in to gym she would she the the Cat ate my Shorts and she would still end up still having to play

## Figure 8

## Sample of Amy's Work from Assigned Writing Project

A's. When their grades are bad they would blame it on someone else. When they get good grades, they always say it was because it was easy. It is too bad that girls have poor self-esteem.

## TYS

I am in a group called \_\_\_\_\_. On the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth we'll be performing on stage at \_\_\_\_\_ or a place like that. There are four people in the group. WE all sing songs that we write ourselves. We got together because we were friends who happened to all be singers. I think it will be a good experience for us to sing in front of an audience for the first time.

## Modeling

On April 17, I will be modeling for a friend h es the same person that I will be singing for. I will be whereing evening gowons that will be they when i get there. I'll be doing mine oun hair and make up. I will be getting ready by my self. What I'll be modeling for is a college fund and it cost \$25.00 for a ticket. I just whant to modelfor funds for people that need money.

## Education

If you want to be a singer you need your education. You need to have your education so you can read to your children and husband and to yourself. Many people don't have their education today, but they are going back to school. You need your education for jobs, to teach school, to read, to write, and to count. If you aren't educated it can be hard on your kids because you will not be able to read to them. Education is very important for the reasons that I just talked about.

output, Amy would hesitate to do the work because she had a fairly serious weakness in this area. (These difficulties will be discussed more definitively in the testing section.)

Amy's ambition was to become a singer. She frequently talked about this interest and lit up when she did so. She seemed confident of her abilities in this area. She did not indicate that she had had any formal training in singing. Toward the end of the school year, she and some friends formed a singing group and performed at a local "Speakeasy." Amy was also interested in modeling, although this interest seemed to have occurred because of the suggestion of a friend of a friend. "Jimmy" got girls together in order to model and had asked Amy if she was interested. They did not get paid to model, but they did get to wear the gowns which he found for them and Amy and felt that it would be good experience for her to be in front of people and that it would help her singing career. She brought a picture in to class one day in which she was with others looking quite sophisticated in a pretty gown. She reported that they were to model at the function room of a local restaurant.

When Amy was in the resource room, she spent much of her time working in a reading program which stressed understanding rules of syllabication and reading

comprehension of content area materials (such as might relate to science or social studies). She also read from novels with the class and worked on a lengthy project involving writing about topics which were of interest to them. Amy also attended regular English class along with other regular classes. (In this school freshmen are scheduled for both an English and reading class.)

While I worked with Amy on several occasions, I will relate two which are indicative of Amy's learning.

On the first occasion which I will describe, Amy skipped into the resource room. She was wearing a black turtleneck and a red overalls-type jumper. She looked as though she could have stepped out of the pages of Seventeen. She had her book bag slung over her shoulder. She seemed to be dancing in her high top sneakers. She sat down at one of the tables and announced, "I've got me a man! And he plays baseball and he's really good at it and maybe he's going to try out for one of the important teams."

Beth asked, "Who is he?" After Amy explained, Beth said, "Well, you better watch out for him. I mean, I'm not trying to put him down or anything, or make you feel down, but, you know, I know him because of one of my friends and he can sort of use people and be real mean sometimes."



"Well, he better treat me good, or it's all over," from Amy. "My men have to treat me good. I learned that from the way my mother's been treated. ...But the thing is I gotta always have me a man."

From Beth, "I'm sorry, I was kinda puttin' him down, Amy, but you're my friend and I think you oughta know how he's been in the past."

No response from Amy, who is now getting out her books. Jean says that people should get to work and all begin. Then she says that she is going to take everyone to the computer room to type, but that Amy has some make-up work for another class to finish. She asks me if I would mind staying to work on it with her. I agree. The rest of the class leaves and Amy gets out a test which was given in another class. She says that she failed the test, but that when they fail the teacher lets them take it to do over and they are allowed to get help. The test consists of various parts. Part one asks that the student unscramble terms which had to do with lodging and transportation. The correct words. Amy had a very hard time with this task, first of all because she was not familiar with some of the terms, and secondly because she had no automatic sense of patterns of vowels and consonants that would usually occur in words. She kept saying that she was a bad speller and that she needed help. I asked her if she knew why they were doing the

paper and she said she thought it was supposed to help them if they were traveling. She said she thought she could read the words and knew some of the meanings, but that she couldn't figure them out when they were scrambled. She tried to eliminate some which she knew, and cross them out so that when she was matching them to the unscrambled words (which were given) she would know what was left. Her strategies for approaching her work seemed to be what one would wish. However, when she became confused, she would simply stop work and timidly ask me for help. My impression was that if I had not been there, she simply would have given up.

I asked Amy whether it bothered her that she had failed the test. She said, no, not really, because they got to take it over with help anyway, so it didn't really matter. Another section of the paper required that students be able to answer questions regarding advertisements photocopied from a telephone book. Correct answers depended on an understanding of why you would pick a hotel which was closer to the airport if you were flying, or why you might want one that advertised a pool if you were going on a lengthy vacation. For the most part, Amy understood these answers and filled in the blanks. When I asked her if she thought she would use this or if she used the telephone book already, she said yes, and she guessed she would if she needed to. We

finished the paper, the bell rang, she gave me a big smile, thanked me for my help and left.

I worked with Amy when she was doing her semester final project which was to consist of a compilation of their writings, edited and typed on the computer. Students in the resource room reading class were allowed to copy writings which they had already done during the semester if they felt they were of good quality, and/or write others. Amy did not have many writings in her folder because of her many absences. Therefore, she had to begin most from scratch. When she sat down at the computer, she simply sat and looked at the screen. I went over and asked her if she wanted any help. She said sure. She said that she didn't know what to write about. I asked her if she had any writings in her folder. She said they mostly weren't done so she would have to get a lot done that week because she wanted to pass. She had already been absent one day that week. She could not think of a topic to write about. I suggested she write about her singing. She began to write about her group of singers and what it was like to go to the speakeasy. She would write a part of a sentence and then turn to me to have me spell a word. I was struck by her constant letter reversals in words and by the limited use of any descriptive words in her writing. I asked her to tell me about her singing before she wrote. She did so with

animation, but with limited use of vocabulary. When she would write a sentence and I would ask her to expand upon it, she would have a very hard time doing so. Her difficulties were compounded by the effort which she had to make both to spell words and then to remember what she had been planning to write when faced with the constant cognitive interruption of either trying to think of a word or trying to spell it.

### Interview

Amy was happy to have me interview her. She did not seem to be uncomfortable with me and answered questions with some expansiveness. Throughout the interview she demonstrated a sense of humor. For example, when I asked her what her ideal school would be like and said that she could have all the money she needed to design it, she said, "All the money I wanted? Skip school! I'd go shopping!" Amy's answers also indicated that she had spent some time reflecting on the course of her life, past and present, and that she contemplated the factors that shaped it. Sometimes she had difficulty sorting out her memories and expressing her thoughts with clarity.

Amy described school (at the present time) as easy. She said, "Teachers are good and they care about you missing school." She said that it kind of bothered her to go to the resource room reading class. She was bothered

because, "I'm like a special child and need special help, which I know that I do, and it's not my fault, you know, but it kind of makes me feel like I'm stupid." The conversation continued and Amy expressed many of the ways in which she does not participate in school.

Judy: Hmm just going there. Would you rather not get special help?

Amy: I like it and all, but it's like stuff like that, everyone knows it and....

Judy: Do you think they do?

Amy: It bothers me a little, but what could I do?

Judy: I don't know; maybe you could say you didn't want to get it.

Amy: (Goes on as though I haven't spoken.) And then I have health.

Judy: What's health about--how to keep healthy?

Amy: Yeah. She talks about drugs and alcohol and explains what it does to your body and we talk about how we feel and all. We got a lot of tests in that class. It's really hard--I don't like that class.

Judy: Because it's hard?

Amy: It's hard. There's a lot of tests. I hate tests. Everyone told me just, just would ask about. There's a big old fifty million questions then she gives us a day to study.

Judy: Do you have trouble with them?

Amy: Oh, I get Es.

Judy: Then what do you do?

Amy: Oh, she says, "Do it over," but I don't even bother because it just stresses me out. I have gym.

Judy: What do you do?

Amy: Oh, like, play ball--racquet ball, whatever. But I never participated in that class, because I didn't like getting dressed and having everyone look at me. But then I started participating three days before class was done playing ball and I liked it, you know.

Judy: And now you're not doing it any more?

Amy: No, how we're doing some stupid things, which God knows what. Then we have to run around the room for like five to eight to 20 minutes and it kills me. I have to stop a lot because I smoke and it's hard for me to breathe. And then I have chorus which I love. I want to be a singer. But it's hard for me because they sing low and I have to sing high to get my notes out.

Judy: Is it fun to be with the people in chorus?

Amy: Yeah, but I almost started crying when I first heard them, because they were so good. Yeah, they're really good and it's like, it's falling apart, you know, 'cause no one really wants to

participate. And every two weeks they'll like want to participate one day. Then we got this concert coming up which I don't have the money to go.

Judy: What does it cost?

Amy: Like 55 bucks.

Judy: That's a lot. There's no fund raising in the school to help you go?

Amy: Yeah, they have like selling lollipops. I only sold one and I haven't turned the money in yet. It's hard, especially when you don't do any. After that I have geography and I love geography. Like some classes I don't like, but some I like 'cause of the teacher or the way they teach it. And I love that class.

I asked her if she read in any of her classes. She said, "No, only in chorus." When I asked her if she had textbooks she said, "Yeah, I got one in geography and health that we don't read--which is a shame--good waste of a book."

I asked Amy about school in the past. Amy remembered her schooling. She recounted that she had stayed back in first grade. She explained that that had really messed her up because she had thought she was starting in second grade and it turned out to be a first grade classroom. She recalled that she had switched schools many times.

She talked about one grade in which she had moved three times.

Amy explained that a good teacher is a teacher who likes teaching and who won't just give you the answer, but will make you try to find it on your own. She said that she was told by teachers to try on her own and was successful, she'd "be all psyched." She described herself as being too lazy to do her school work or even to get up in the morning. She explained that in school she would often not do any work. During one year when the work was hard for her she said that she, "just sat there and looked stupid," and that the teacher had allowed her to do that.

Amy talked about the fact that she was afraid she would drop out when she turned 16 because she was so lazy. In the same sentence she said that she comes home and is the only one who cleans her house and that it's hard. When I asked her what would keep her in school she said, "Teachers that make you look for the answers, that would be more challenging. The others don't care." Amy echoed the theme regarding the importance of challenge that ran through our interview when she said that her ideal school would be "challenging, challenging!"

When I asked about her future, Amy reiterated the idea that she would like to be a singer and a model. At one point during the interview she said, "I've always wanted to be an inventor, and I always come up with good



ideas, but I figure why even think about it, I can't do it. So why waste my time?" She wasn't able to explain why she couldn't do it. When I asked her she said that when you say something to people, you should take a look into yourself and "put it with what your life is." She ended the interview with a statement which was not related to the immediate conversation. She said, "I think kids would like to be told that they have to do things."

### Joel

Joel was a 16 year old sophomore. When I first observed Joel I found it difficult to describe him. Physically, he would probably be thought of by most as a handsome young man who was usually neatly dressed in clothes which would be considered to be typical high school attire. He appeared to take considerable care in his appearance. The difficulty which I had in describing him in other ways continued throughout the year. The reasons for this difficulty seemed to spring from the fact that his actions were not consistent. One day he would act withdrawn and quiet and as though he wished to be, and thought of himself, as a positive leader among his peers. On the next day he might be loud, disruptive and either separated from his peers, or interacting in a way which would either disrupt their work, or deliberately lead them into trouble. As might be inferred, in both of these

modes of acting, Joel was a strong personality who appeared to have leadership abilities. People sometimes state that a person has "presence." Joel had presence.

In some ways Joel reminded me of the dictionary definition of an oxymoron. He was deafeningly silent. These seemingly contradictory aspects of Joel's ways of being made it particularly hard to interact with him. It was hard to know which Joel was present on which day and therefore, what approach would be most suitable. Although Jean, who had had Joel as a student for two years, seemed to be trusted, respected and liked by Joel, I was never able to establish a relationship with him in which I felt there was very much trust or little regard. Joel appeared to make every effort to ignore my presence unless circumstances forced him to interact with me. I had the impression I was one more adult with whom he did not want to establish a relationship which would require him to reveal much about either his academics or anything personal, because the risk that it would not work out was simply too great. According to Jean, when she had taught him the year before in the resource room, he had initially been out of control, sometimes jumping on desks and physically disrupting the class in other ways. However, she had worked hard to establish a relationship with him and explain to him that he could be a leader among his peers. She felt that this had helped to improve his

behavior, along with the fact that his home conditions had become more stable.

At the time of this study Joel was identified as having both an emotional handicap and a learning disability. Medical information in Joel's folder indicated that he was placed on Ritalin during his kindergarten year (which he ceased taking in grade three) and had had plastic surgery on his left eyelid. When in kindergarten, Joel was referred by his mother to a local medical doctor who often worked with students having learning and attention problems. At the age of 6-4, he was given the Stanford Binet Intellectual Scale which placed him at the top of the Average range. At this time he was also given visual perceptual testing which revealed age appropriate skills, as well as language testing which also indicated age/grade appropriate skills.

In grade one he began participating in a self-contained program in which issues related to emotional difficulties and behavior problems were addressed. He received most academic subjects in this program, although records indicate that he was mainstreamed for math.

Beginning in grade five he was successfully mainstreamed into a regular math class.

Intellectual testing, which was done in years following Joel's initial assessment (using the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised [WISC-R]),

consistently indicated that Joel's IQ was in the Average range with little subtest scatter. The most recent WISC-R done at age 13-10 indicated that Joel's Verbal IQ was in the Average range, and his Performance IQ (non-verbal) IQ was at the high end of the Average range. Three of his six non-verbal subtest scores were above average. The examiner noted that, "Joel's performance on the WISC-R did not reflect the problems he has been having in school."

Joel's achievement testing, using the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT), indicated math performance from one to three years above grade level and reading achievement between one and three years below grade level.

Reading Scores on the PIAT indicated inconsistent test performance. For example, on his grade five test he received a Reading Recognition score grade equivalent 4.4 and Reading Comprehension score of grade equivalent 4.1. On the PIAT given in grade six, he received a Reading Recognition score of grade 3.5 and a Reading Comprehension score of grade equivalent 3.4.

Records indicate that as part of Joel's special program placement he and his family received counseling. However, it was also noted in records that his mother did not always attend scheduled sessions, although alternate times were suggested in order to make them more convenient

for her. Notes on these sessions reveal a pattern of family disruption. At one point there is a note in the folder which indicated a concern registered with the Welfare Department that there were weapons in the home. Issues of poor hygiene and bruises, attributed by Joel to fights with neighborhood children, were also referenced in reports regarding progress made in regard to emotional and behavioral difficulties.

Notes on treatment regarding emotional and behavioral issues (weekly individual psychological therapy and daily group therapy) when he was in grade three indicated that Joel had the ability to utilize insight into anger and anxiety related to his chaotic and unpredictable family environment. The notes stated, "Joel cares deeply how others perceive him and often plays out themes of control... He perceives himself as having no control over his behavior." In grade five, reports indicated that he had little insight into his behavior, that he had a difficult time when limits are set and that he had temper tantrums and then seemed to regress.

Subsequent records indicated some progress with emotional and behavioral difficulties although improvements in behavior are inconsistent. On his most recent IEP his placement was in regular high school classes with resource room help in reading and counseling. Goals and objectives included work toward improvement in

organizational skills, reading and written language skills, speaking skills and survival skills. He also listed completion of academic assignments and participation in class activities as goals.

Goals regarding behavior focused on decreasing disruptive behavior, acting respectfully toward peers and staff, being on time and using appropriate language. Therapeutic goals included being able to deal with personal issues, increasing self-esteem and building positive relationships.

In class Joel performed inconsistently. When reading, Joel often was able to read materials which I would judge to be in the range of between fourth and seventh grade levels with some fluency. His literal and inferential comprehension skills were often excellent, as was his recall. However, his reading was compromised by a sight vocabulary which was not well developed and by some lack of vocabulary knowledge, although he was frequently able to figure out the meaning of words from the context. His reading was also made more difficult by his problem in keeping his place; often he skipped either phrases or whole lines when reading. This not only required added effort which diminished his reading speed and made him tired, but also interfered with his comprehension. It was unclear to me how much of this was related to some problem with visual perception and/or how much was related to lack

of reading practice and his difficulty in maintaining his focus and concentration when attending to some academic tasks.

Written language samples included in this study are representative of that which I observed during my time in Joel's resource room. (See Figures 9-11.) Most immediately noticeable was the fact that Joel did not use cursive and that his printing was not indicative of what one would expect of a sophomore in high school. His use of varied vocabulary is limited and his word choice was often determined by sentences and phrases within readings which he was able to copy in order to answer comprehension questions. When his writing did not involve response to other written language, the same limited use of words was noted and a pattern of language which had little flow when he read.

When Joel used the computer to write (which he often resisted doing, although he knew how to use the computer with some aid and was interested in its mechanics), there was improvement in the amount which he would write at one time. However, he still required considerable assistance in finding ways to relate the many ideas which he had. Part of the reason for this need for assistance was that he had little confidence in his spelling ability which was, in fact, quite limited and which was hampered by his difficulty in applying knowledge of phonics when writing.

Figure 9

Sample of Joel's Work Using Marketed Program

OUTLINE/PARAGRAPH FORM

TOPIC How Transportation improved

DETAILS Before <sup>the</sup> steam engine people had to  
walk on foot or by wagon or horse.  
With out <sup>steam</sup> transportation was very  
slow. It was painful walking ~~and~~ <sup>or</sup> riding

CONCLUSION ~~I think~~ ~~technology~~ technology has ~~grows~~ <sup>grown</sup>



## Figure 10

## Sample 1 of Joel's Work: Assigned Writing Project

The call of the wild is something you have to do no matter what. Like Buck when the dogs were howling. Buck was ~~hearing~~<sup>hearing</sup> his call the wild. John heard his call of the wild when he was going on boats. Lots of people and animals listen to ~~there~~<sup>their</sup> call of the wild. Lots of people get in trouble because they ~~listen~~<sup>listen</sup> to ~~the~~<sup>the</sup> call of the wild.

Figure 11

Sample 2 of Joel's Work: Assigned Writing Project

Yes he did do jail time, that's where he met a man. I don't know his name who introduced him to the muslim religion which changed his life.

They think the muslims along with the CIA killed him. I think! People

who that were alive when Malcolm X was shot. They say IT Brought memories Back memories when Denzel Washington played the part of Malcolm in Malcolm X.

The Movie and they thank Denzel for playing that part.

He sure looks like him! Did you read the

He also appeared to lack the ability to construct his ideas and translate them into sentences, rather than phrases or parts of ideas. My impression was that this was mainly the result of limited practice in writing, rather than some particular inherent difficulty with language production.

In general, then, my observation of Joel's reading/writing abilities indicated that, while he was able to comprehend concepts when reading and to think abstractly about concepts gleaned from exposure to general information in his world, he was hindered from using these cognitive abilities because of poor basic reading skills such as application of knowledge of phonics to sound out words, difficulty in tracking when reading, and difficulty with limited word knowledge. In the area of written language, Joel's difficulty spelling words and translating his thoughts into meaningful, fluid language, probably due to lack of practice, caused his production to be considerably below what would be expected for a student of his overall cognitive abilities and grade level. Needless to say, this was of particular frustration to Joel when he found himself in a position of having many political ideas to put forth and limited ability to do so.

Except for the two days during which Joel and I wrote a letter which he sent to President Clinton, the Mayor of the city in which he lived, the principal of the school

and the school newspaper (discussed in the section anecdote), I watched Joel more than I worked with him. As stated above in relation to his general demeanor, Joel's academic work was inconsistent. In general, he much preferred to do work which he saw as related to his own world, although I found some students in these sections more comfortable with work which was rote and did not necessitate reflection related to their lives. Joel had strong opinions about local and national events when he read about them and seemed to be most academically engaged when he was reading about or discussing situations in which political action had or might occur. (He was especially interested in issues which involved people's civil rights.) Despite this general need to have curriculum related to his world, Joel would also sometimes do very well and work with interest on worksheets which were more rote and followed a consistent pattern. What stood out when I watched Joel work was the inconsistency of his focus. Some days he would seem focused and diligent, regardless of the type of task, and other days he would have his head down for much of the period, or if he was looking at his work, his focus would seem to be on the task one minute and off it the next.

During the days following Joel's letter writing and particularly after his letter to the school newspaper was published, he seemed proud and somewhat more confident.

However, shortly after that he came to school with his hand bandaged because he had hurt it when he punched it into a car window because he was so angry about a remark which was made. During that period of time, he became defiant and resistant. On one occasion around this time when I sat down to work with Joel because I perceived that he was having difficulty with the material, he snapped belligerently at me that he did not need my help and to leave him alone. He then moved his chair to the other end of the table and covered his papers with his arm. (After some time had passed, he called Jean [his teacher] over to help him.) Jean reprimanded him and he put his head down. When class was over, she related that she sometimes was in conflict when correcting him because of an incident that had happened during the previous year. At that time she had spoken angrily to the class about comments that had been made because the comments were belittling to women. Joel had become very upset, begun to cry and talked at length about what a horrible person he was. Jean had been taken aback by his outburst because of the power with which he had turned against himself and the internal conflicts which this outburst had revealed.

Joel's inconsistency in behavior and focus often made it difficult to discern what he knew and did not know, as well as what he was capable of and was not. Though he

seemed to have little regard for his academic abilities, and in fact had significant difficulties in both reading/written language despite years of intervention, it was my impression that he had much more potential than his actual achievement indicated. He seemed to be particularly capable of and interested in work which required understanding of concepts. He also seemed to be able to relate past knowledge with new knowledge and to draw associations.

### Interview

Joel agreed to allow me to interview him only as a favor to his teacher. Throughout the interview he appeared nervous and remote. He had no answers to many of the questions which I asked him. For example, he could think of nothing when I asked him what his ideal school was like. Finally, after I produced a list of categories and several minutes had elapsed, he said, "There'd be no smoking on the premises," in a loud tone of voice and with what seemed to be relief that he had come up with something. When I asked him if he could draw his school on the blackboard (because I knew he was a good artist), he said he could think of nothing to draw. He finally did draw a large building, but had to be prodded to fill in any details. Although Joel's reticence may have been the result of resistance, his demeanor seemed to indicate confusion, possibly fear (of being embarrassed?) and

difficulty coming up with ideas or ways to express them. The following excerpts from our interview give Joel's responses to questions about his present and past schooling, his ideal school and his thoughts about the future.

I asked Joel to tell me what courses he had. He didn't answer at first.

Judy: Want to run through your courses?

No response.

You have English, American Studies, math, weight training.

Joel: No, math I got dropped.

Judy: Why did math get dropped?

Joel: Matter of fact, I got two study halls. Ha.

Judy: Why did math get dropped?

Joel: I was not supposed to be there at the beginning of the year. It was because I didn't pass prep algebra so I wasn't supposed to go into algebra.

Judy: Oh.

Joel: They was supposed to have it changed at the beginning of the year but then they messed up. Somethin' went wrong, so I guess they took me out.

Judy: So do you have to get a certain number of math credits and now you won't be able to get them?

Joel: No, I'll still get the credits for the year.

Judy: You will? Just for being there for a part of the year?

Joel: No, because I know Mr. Miller (the principal) personally for lots of time, so, and he knows my brother, so I guess he'll probably just give me the credit.

Judy: Wow. OK, so then there's Jean's class and then there's study hall after that.

Joel: Aa seventh, there's peer tutor.

Judy: Oh. What would your ideal school be like?

Joel: Uh...

Judy: I'm interested in what kind of books you would use, what kind of teachers you would have, what kind of building you'd be in, uh, would you have freedom to go to lunch, how big the classes would be, that kind of stuff, any other things you could think of?

Joel described his ideal school as a school in New York City. It would have a lot of windows so that he could look out at the city all the time. I asked him about courses.

Judy: What classes would you take or would you have somebody take? What would be the best thing for somebody to take?

Joel: Ah....



Judy: If you were the principal and you were enrolling them. You can have all the money in the world.

Joel: Ah... Probably a basketball course.

Judy; That would be good.

Joel: Because a lot of people down there play basketball. They'd be like every now and then a couple of players from the New York Knicks would go there and teach people how to play.

Judy: That would be great. Then what else?

Joel: These is the classes I'd probably recommend. A weight lifting class. Um... Ah... A cooking class without no writing work--written work. Hands on. Ah, ah... Then, ah, business classes, like, ah, it would be you go in there and it would be just like you was workin' at a regular office and you'd learn accountin' and it would be just like you was doin' somebody's taxes only it would be problems or something like that.

Judy: So it would be like the real world. Would it be less boring that way?

Joel: But all the classes would be like real life, what you're going to be doin' cause like high school kids--what we do here--has nothing to do with what we're goin' to do later on. I mean it leads us that way, but my school would be something like

the real world and so you'd have some advantage before you got out there.

Joel then talked about a reading class which would have projects all the time. He also said they would be regular-type classes like he has now. I asked Joel about his school history.

Judy: Can you talk about what school was like starting in the first grade?

Joel: I don't remember.

Judy: How about starting in sixth grade?

No answer.

How long have you been here?

Joel: Since I was about six or seven.

Judy: Did you go to? (I named two local schools.)

Joel: No, kindergarten, I went to, ah (named local school). That yellow school. It ain't there now. First through sixth I went to (named another local school). Then I went to junior high. Then I went here.

He could give me no other information. When I asked Joel what he'd like in his future, he said he couldn't think of anything. When I prodded him to tell me about his future wishes, he said, "I'd like a house and a car, but I don't think I will have them." He had no further response.

What the Teachers, Administrators, Counselors and Support  
Staff Said

An administrator who was interviewed related, "For anyone who has a reading disability in high school, life is hell," in many ways sums up what was said when those working with high school students with learning disabilities were questioned about their school lives.

Those who worked with students with learning disabilities saw this group of students as heterogeneous. They saw them as heterogeneous in terms of their potential and ability. They also saw them as heterogeneous in terms of their attitudes toward school and the support systems in their lives. The futures which they saw for these students were dependent upon these factors.

Reading and writing were seen as an important part of the lives of high school students and something which put anyone having difficulty in these areas at a disadvantage. Reading and writing were also seen as important as part of most curriculum areas and as a means to partake in our culture. In discussing the fact that there are no substitutes for these abilities, one teacher explained, "Reading and writing are modality processes. Just hearing it and talking about it are good, but I think the reading and writing have got to go along with it." Failure in these areas was seen as creating fears which stop risk taking in learning among these students.

An administrator said that high school students with learning difficulties have often "pushed themselves to the edge of society" by the time they enter high school. Difficulties with reading and writing were seen as factors which increased marginalization.

A guidance counselor's statement represented the thoughts of many who were interviewed when she discussed the degree of separation which sometimes, but not always, occurs in the levels of high school students with learning disabilities.

If you were learning disabled, it would be a very unhappy experience, I would think, because by not doing well you're ostracized from certain social groups. The kids who do well play together and stay together and hang out together. I know a couple of LD kids who are the exception to the rule. They come from very supportive families and they do have their sights set on college. They tend to be kids who I don't think their friends have a clue that they are struggling with school work. They just put on a whole persona of being a regular person, and it's their family secret, basically.

Being a regular person, being thought of as like everyone else, and the consequent need to hide and cover up learning disabilities were themes that came up repeatedly in conversations about high school students with learning disabilities. Avoidance was seen as one way of hiding. Another way was acting out. Asking for help was described as a problem for students with learning disabilities and connected to the need for hiding and covering up.

It's the cultural thing that kids in school don't like kindergarten being in special programs, having people tell you you are stupid. Why would you want to take a risk when you are a teenager. You're supposed to be macho, and you're supposed to be wearing the right clothes and being with the right friends and meeting at the right places. Always there's a chance you might drink beer and be willing to take that chance.

Female students were seen as more able to accept help, and less apt to hide. However, this obtaining help on their part was also connected with passivity and lack of self-sufficiency.

Lowered standards and expectations of this population were discussed. Various reasons were given for this. Regular classroom teachers talked of and sometimes were seen as spending less time on the curriculum for lower level students than for others. Lack of materials and time to plan were also seen as problems. Teachers were seen as not analyzing students' work in ways which would help them to understand what teaching was necessary to maximize student understanding. Homogeneous grouping in lower level classes was seen as problematic because, "They feed off each other's behaviors and they learn they are dumb." Students were often seen as acting passively in lower level classes. Their belief, "If I don't bother you (the teachers), you won't bother me," was thought to feed this passivity. Teachers were seen as frequently accommodating students' weaknesses adding to their lack of progress. For example, students who were seen as not

being able to read and write were, consequently, given minimum amounts of reading and writing to do. Students in lower level classes (the classes in which those whom I observed were placed) were seen as not completing homework assignments. Therefore, they were not given homework.

Instructional methods were seen as crucial if these students were to make academic progress and grow in their personal lives. Small group and one on one instruction were seen as important. Time for reinforcement of regular classroom assignments was seen as crucial to the success of students. A learned helplessness was described as part of the problem which these students had. Consequently, it was felt that teachers needed to be structure learning activities and gradually give students added responsibility.

The importance of the family as a support system was emphasized. Families that allowed students to have a model in which there were goals, aspirations and in which self-sufficiency was demonstrated and fostered were seen as a crucial variable in the lives of students with learning disabilities (and all students). Parental involvement was also seen as important. All felt that significant others could also be very important in the lives of students and allow role modeling. These others were also seen as able to show support for students and

belief in them, factors which were seen as crucial in their lives.

As high school students with learning disabilities were seen as a heterogeneous group of various abilities and personal characteristics, they were also seen as having futures which could not be predicted as uniformly bright or bleak. Those whom I interviewed saw some students with learning disabilities as having bright futures. However, they saw those who read and wrote well below grade level (as did most of the students in this study) as having futures which would in many cases be difficult. However, factors such as family support and role models, degree of severity of academic problems, and intensity and success of remedial efforts during the remainder of their high school years were seen as variables which would have direct bearing on their chances for futures which held promise.

The possibility that these students would have lives which were passive rather than active, in which they would feel themselves to have no control, were among the greatest concerns expressed. While those I interviewed expressed optimism that some students would lead productive lives, in which they made meaningful choices, the futures of many were seen more pessimistically as holding promise of little demonstration of, or belief in, personal efficacy. It was feared that these students

would lead lives in which they saw other people or institutions as in control of who they were and what they could do--a bleak prediction at best and a legacy which those interviewed passionately hoped to help prevent.

In Chapter V I will discuss my findings in this study. I will develop conclusions based on my observations, case studies, discussions with school personnel, and relevant literature. I will then consider implications based on my conclusions. Finally, I will also discuss the limitations of the current study.



## CHAPTER V

### FINDINGS

#### Discussion of Data

Being a participant observer in this resource room, completing case studies, and interviewing school personnel has taught me many things, not the least of which is to be wary of drawing superficial conclusions regarding the subject of education. Students with learning disabilities may be seen as a culture. Seeing students with learning disabilities as a Culture has led me to acknowledge that seeing them within the context of school is crucial to understanding the depth and complexity of the education of these students. Rhymer (1993), in Genie, talks of telling a story of transcendence, the story of a child's attempts to transcend the horrors of her childhood and the story of researchers' attempts to transcend the limits of their knowledge. At the beginning of this dissertation, I discussed the lack of transcendence which this study would reveal. Now, as I review data collected in this study, I think again of the word transcendence.

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) indicate that qualitative researchers frequently develop or redefine purposes as they proceed through a study. They term this recursivity. This activity, they explain, allows

researchers to address both a priori and posteriori goals with consideration for how and why modifications occurred. When, at the end of this collection of data, I find myself haunted by the word "transcendence," I find that I have come to understand transcendence in a different way. In fact, I have watched a story of an attempted transcendence. Collection of data has allowed me to see the transcendence of students and teachers in ways which would not necessarily initially be encompassed in the definition of that term. The recognition of a broader meaning of transcendence is closely linked to the recognition of complexity which explains the need for recursivity. Possibly throughout this study there was a never-ending attempt at creating transcendence on the part of the teachers, and an effort tainted by an unspoken sense of futility on the part of some students, as well as hope of progress on the part of others.

Many of the students in Section I showed little recognition that there was any reason for their daily efforts; they saw themselves as unable to read and when questioned did not see themselves as making progress. They sometimes discussed the fact that they might receive a good grade, but they usually expected poor grades to be a fact of life. Students in Section II were more optimistic about the possibility of progress but still generally tentative. When students talked about their

work in classes, they never seemed clear about their academic status, except to understand that they were often able to do tests and assignments over should they fail. Students in Section II seemed to see themselves as having made progress in their reading class the year before and thought they were making some that year. They did not seem to see writing as something which was very much a part of school. When they wrote, most appeared to do so ritualistically, but with no real sense that writing was, or would ever be, a means to communicate.

The students depicted in the case studies illustrated the range of progress and sense of progress which all students in this study had. Amy seemed to consider school to be something which she must make herself attend, but which had little relation to her life. She was absent so frequently that the lack of continuity and practice in her work prohibited any real progress or transcendence. Her comments about her school history seemed to indicate a sequence of events which never really came to completion, never "paid off," both because of her difficulties with some of her school work, and because of the discontinuity of her school experiences due to her family's frequent moves.

Todd saw little progress in his work. He usually stated that he already knew how to do any assignment given and then became angry and depressed when he had

difficulty. He had labeled himself as stupid and seemed to see all of his efforts in academics thwarted by his definition of ineptitude.

Joel presented a more ambivalent persona. Sometimes, for example, during his letter writing and when he was involved in the political ideas in his readings, he appeared to break forth, he appeared to have strength of character and leadership which predicted a kind of transcendence. However, on other days, he would appear to disappear into himself or unleash an angry barrage of words which precluded any notion that he saw progress in his work or his life.

Beth was representative of the few students who saw their work leading to improvement in academics and their lives moving forward beyond their former personal and school difficulties. Beth would persevere in her studies and personal efforts because she saw herself as improving and having greater control over her school and personal life. This was fostered in part by family support and the opportunities which she was given to read books, paint her room, interact with her friends and share in responsibilities at home.

In describing the story of Genie, a horribly deprived and abused child and her intellectual and social emergence, Rhymer (1993) tells a story much more dramatic than the story which I have told. I collected data

regarding high school students who would initially be considered by most to have relatively mild handicaps. Yet the commonness of the goals of which Rhymer (1993) speaks in a case of much greater handicap are goals which are also applicable to this study. He states, "What the scientists wished to discover, Genie wished to claim--a human birthright, a key to our essential, abiding natures" (p. 217). In the classroom which I watched in the case studies which I conducted, in the conversations which I collected with school personnel, I saw the struggle of teachers wishing to discover and students wishing to claim a human birthright. After analyzing my data, it is my opinion that the relative mildness of the handicaps of the students in my study did not diminish the seriousness of the consequences which the lack of development of reading and writing skills, inherently a part of the expectations of our society, had for them or those teaching them. Furthermore, review of my data has led me to believe that investigation of the school lives of these students did not lend itself readily, or with any sense of fairness, to assignments of praise or blame regarding their successes or failures.

How does one give someone a future? In the birthright which is mentioned by Rhymer, a future is surely implied. Is the notion of the future so tied to the notion of the past that therein lies the key? When

one instructs in a classroom, one hopes to help to provide a future which is fulfilling. Certainly the teacher and paraprofessionals in the resource room hoped that their resource room instruction would help these students to have a fulfilling future. Instruction in the resource room had many components. The students in both Sections I and II were there in lieu of being in a regular reading class. Therefore, reading and writing instruction were primary objectives for Jean.

Jean and others had specifically assigned students to have reading instruction in the resource room in order to assure small group instruction. The curriculum was specifically and carefully planned by others in the belief that the marketed system of instruction used was valuable and had been shown to help students to progress in reading and writing. Journal writing and trade book reading were built into the curriculum to enhance the materials in the marketed program. Jean made strong attempts to give students materials which were relevant to their lives as part of their reading assignments.

Another type of curriculum occurred on Mondays. Jean used that period every week to have students share their experiences. This was done in order to create a sense of group cooperation and community as well as in order to reinforce and teach social and language skills, including the ability both to verbalize and listen. One reason that

this had been incorporated into the curriculum was that Jean had worked with the students in Section I during the previous year and found them seriously lacking in these abilities. Part of her goal was to have the students learn ways to demonstrate respect for one another, since she also felt that their ability to do this was minimal. Although these skills might be listed as important by many teachers, they are not often taught in such a prescribed manner, particularly at the high school level, since the assumption is made that the ability to show respect, verbalize and share experiences and listen are in place. In fact, these abilities were not inherently understood or demonstrated by most students. This lack of understanding altered the manner of instruction in the room in terms of time spent on reading and writing instruction. It also caused the instructional orientation to frequently shift between what might be thought of as academic instruction and what might be considered instruction in terms of social awareness and pragmatics.

As the classroom anecdotes indicated, days in Section I were inconsistent. Sometimes students seemed unfocused and preoccupied and (almost unintentionally) disruptive. Sometimes they were remote and unengaged. On other days they were interested in completing their work, well behaved, fairly focused and cooperative.

In Section I reading and writing instruction focused on a marketed program of instruction. The materials in this program included workbooks which were consumable and which consisted of exercises which involved rules of syllabication and practice implementing these rules in order to break down and sound out words. Another aspect of this program included reading passages which discussed topics of general interest, such as the customs of American Indians. These passages were approximately a page in length which students were required to read and summarize, using a systematic approach to summarization which was delineated in the program. Students in Section I also read Rap magazine and responded to questions about these selections and wrote responses to them in writing journals. The journals were read and responded to by Jean. An abridged version of a book was also read by the students as a group. Students were allowed to listen to rap music during the class with the stipulation that it was at a reasonable volume and that they were doing their work. This privilege was revoked during the last weeks of school because there were several days in which not much was accomplished and students spent too much time switching tapes, etc.

The students in Section I rarely seemed interested in the materials on which they were working, whether it was popular magazine articles or more programmed materials



assigned by the teacher. Once in a while they would become interested in a story in the magazine, particularly if it was political in nature or involved a sports hero or musician. Even this interest was shallow, in part because they usually did not have correct prior knowledge of the person (although they did know some sports statistics about teams). They never, even when prodded by teachers or paraprofessionals, seemed interested in gaining further knowledge or in discussing the relationship between the events in the person's life and their own. The students in this section were interested in completing their assignments because they were sometimes allowed to choose activities as a reward when this happened and also because they were graded on their assignments. In general, students showed almost no engagement with the materials and wanted to achieve completion either by having another student give an answer or by attempting to wheedle the answer from an adult.

Students were encouraged to help each other and work cooperatively; however, when this type of sharing occurred, there was often no effort at sharing understanding of the materials, but rather an attempt to pass on and receive the correct answers as rapidly as possible. When students completed their work, they would often state, with what seemed like pride, the fact that their assignment sheet was done. There appeared to be no

connection between learning or interest in any of the material and completing the work. Not surprisingly, there was often no statement to indicate that students saw any relationship between past and present knowledge or notion on the part of students that what they were learning had any relationship to themselves (even though many articles in *Rap* expressed contemporary and important issues). This was true despite the fact that the teacher constantly pointed out these relationships. This was also true when students were asked to write about their own lives. In most cases they would write only a paragraph and then discuss the fact that they had nothing else to say. This was the case even when they were given topics, asked about specific events in their lives or when it was suggested that they write about something about which they had spoken.

In short, in almost all cases, there was little or no indication that students saw any connection between reading and writing and their lives. Despite this lack of engagement and ability to see connections between their lives and this learning, they were often proud when they completed their assignments. They seemed to equate this completion with being a successful student and having the ability to learn. Statements such as, "See I already knew how to do this," or "Look at how fast I did this and how easy it was for me" were frequently juxtaposed with their

boisterous statements indicating that they had completed assignments.

These public announcements, open expressions of their abilities, were coupled with an almost constant hiding of their work. While some students wanted it to be known to others in the room that they had completed work, there was a constant effort on the part of most students to hide it. Sometimes they worked with papers on their laps, half tucked under desks. Sometimes they worked with arms crossed and heads down over their work. Although they would often ask the teacher or paraprofessional or myself for help, this solicitation was erratic. Even when there was an attempt to obtain help, there was often little attempt to understand the material, and the effectiveness of help was modified by frequent excuses on the part of the students regarding their difficulty with the assignment, or their desire to rapidly find out the answer, write it down and be done. While there was sometimes public expression of arrogance about their knowledge, there was also a less proclaimed sense of private humiliation.

Ekwell and Shanker (1988) state the fact that the effects of poor reading ability on self-esteem are great. They explain that poor readers often worry that they will be "found out." This need to hide was also echoed in the statements by the students interviewed by Johnston (1985).

In both of these studies, those interviewed indicated the fear of humiliation as an aspect of their school lives which caused them to limit some of their academic efforts. Glenn, in Fairbanks' (1992) case study, also spoke of his feelings of being a failure and the way that this caused him to worry that others would know. In Lee and Jackson (1992) the co-author, Christopher Lee, expressed his school experiences in terms of the title of his book Faking It. According to Lee, hiding his lack of academic facility was the primary focus in his school life. This theme of hiding was played out over and over in Sections I and II. It was played out not only in terms of the students' need to hide their work but in their overall demeanor. Frequently they had their heads bowed and their eyes cast down. As I mentioned in one anecdote, when entering the room, they would often not speak to me or even glance my way. They seemed sometimes not to even glance at each other, but would simply move to their seats as though they were wearing blinders to shut out what was around them.

As anecdotes indicated, days in Section II were more consistent. Students enjoyed being in the class. My impression was that they felt secure there and found the environment pleasant. They felt they were learning and, in fact, most, if not all, students seemed to make reading and writing progress during the year.

In Section II students also used the marketed program. They wrote in journals and read two novels as a group. These students were encouraged to choose trade books and respond to these in their journals. Jean also wrote written responses to their journals. In general they were interested in learning. They wanted to know how to read; they wanted to know how to write. For the most part they saw themselves as making improvements and it was important to them to think that they were successful in these areas. Hiding still occurred, but to a somewhat more limited degree. They saw being competent in reading and writing as necessary to have in life and they considered completion of their assignments as a way to gain this competence. Often, however, they did not readily appear to see any connection between the reading and writing skills they were learning and anything specifically related to themselves or their lives. In most cases they seemed to see little connection between who they were and the work which they were doing. For example, they did not see characters in books as people who were experiencing the same feelings which they were, or writing as a way to share information with friends. Their acknowledgement of the importance of learning reminded me of people watching a movie of what is supposed to be important in life and then going through the same

motions in hopes that they will become part of that reality.

Students in Section II also had a period once a week during which they shared their experiences. In similar fashion to Section I these sharing times were incorporated into the curriculum to promote a sense of community within the classroom, and to help students with language and social abilities. The tenor of this sharing time was more consistently amiable in Section II than in Section I. Some students, however, had difficulty expressing themselves and interacting in a manner which would be expected of those who were their age.

As the final projects indicated, at the end of the year the performance of Section I was still inconsistent. Students started to work on assignments with some commitment, but showed little follow through. When students received failing grades for their poor efforts, they were at first angry and then accepted the poor grades. They seemed to have little sense that a good grade was the result of continued effort. Students in Section II completed their projects with pride and with the belief that they had learned and made progress. Their work, while it would still be considered below expectations for the Average student in that grade, was the result of much effort and careful execution. They did what they were supposed to do.

### Family Problems

Many factors complicated the primary goals of instruction for these students. One factor was related to their personal lives. Classroom routines were often altered by short renditions by students of problems occurring in their personal lives. Most of these were related to family difficulties, though some revolved around events at school or personal problems of the boyfriend/girlfriend type. Occasionally there was good news to share, but this was less frequent than explanations of disturbing or disquieting events. Sometimes these events were known to the teacher through information given to her by counselors who worked with the students. In these cases, although sometimes students did not even bring the situation up, the presence of the problem hovered over the room like an unwanted and unnamed specter that was often confirmed by unruly or withdrawn behavior on the part of a student. These specters of difficulty were so frequent that students often seemed unsurprised or disinterested in students' sometimes almost bizarre and upsetting stories of events in their lives.

Although in this study I did not intend to explore the home lives of these students, their constant references to situations, as well as discussions by school personnel of these situations, made the impact of their family lives blatant. One member of the staff related a

visit to a student's home to discuss a health issue with a parent. She stated that when she entered the house she noticed disassembled toys, the result of a family project, scattered through the house. She relayed that when observing the disarray, she thought how representative the scattered parts seemed to be of the lives of the students with whom she worked (many of whom were in Jean's sections).

Case studies indicated the variety of home situations represented in the lives of students in Sections I and II. However, in two of the cases, family lives had been seriously disrupted. While Todd seemed to sometimes blame himself and retreat inwardly when faced with family difficulties, Joel would sometimes become passive and inward; at other times he would be aggressive and demonstrate anger in outward acts. Family difficulties in both of these cases had clearly resulted in pervading emotional difficulties for the students.

Although Amy's life was apparently more stable, there was still some inconsistency and disturbance. This disturbance, which seemed to be caused by some financial difficulties as well as the many uprootings of the family, contributed to Amy's seemingly sad demeanor and lack of involvement in school. For example, she saw herself as the only one who cared for the house. Her perpetual tardiness seemed to go unchecked by adults who might have



been able to foster more responsibility in Amy. Amy appeared to view the women in her life as somewhat lacking in control. In contrast, Beth's family stability and support appeared to help her to be successful in both her personal and school life. She clearly viewed the women in her family as strong people who had overcome hardships and persevered. She saw them as caring for her and attempting to help her succeed. Jean reported that Beth's mother was an advocate for her daughter and a strong and prevailing voice in discussions regarding her education.

In an extensive study of the relationship between family and school in terms of student success, Snow (1991) discusses the increasing lack of engagement which families have in their children's lives as the children became high school age. She describes this lack of engagement as one of the debilitating factors in the school lives of those whom she studied. She explains this lack of engagement as the result of the increasingly complex world of high school, which often includes a larger setting and more teachers.

Parents of the students in this study were representative of those in Snow's (1991) study. They were frequently, though certainly not always, unengaged with the school lives of their children. They did not respond to school notices and sometimes did not show up for meetings to discuss their children. When parents did

attend, they were sometimes either uncomfortable in the surroundings or angry at school personnel for their child's difficulties. Consequently, relationships were often strained. Parents sometimes (as in the case of Joel's mother) did not avail themselves of services offered by the schools as a means of family and student support.

Although in this study I did not interview families, there is little doubt, as pointed out by Waggoner (1990), that students' reading and writing difficulties and their general academic problems are not only impacted by their family situations, but these problems also impact upon the lives of their families. Much time and energy is spent in attempting to deal with these difficulties and the feelings of emotional loss associated with having a child who must struggle against a handicap. This was obvious in the discussions at special education meetings held with the families of these students. Anger and frustration about their children's difficulties were frequently expressed by parents.

#### Deviance

The students in these sections had been removed from regular classes to attend the resource room. In a sense, this removal was representative of the school lives of these students. In many ways, they had been pulled from

the regular experiences of school life throughout their years of schooling. They had been pulled out for numerous factors which created a situation in which they were marginalized.

When one is marginalized, there is the option of creating another group in which you are allowed membership. There is also the option of remaining alone. An odd situation existed for the students whom I observed, a situation which allowed them neither of the above options. Throughout most of their school lives, they had been pulled from their peers and placed in another group. Membership in this second group required that the student demonstrate a type of failure (or at least a lack of "normal" success) in terms of overall classroom functioning, most usually in terms of functioning in reading and writing. Consequently, to claim membership in such a group was also to acknowledge a label often associated with failure.

Although many students who have been identified as learning disabled have not been pulled from a group and have achieved a good measure of success in classroom activities, it is fair to say that this was not the case for most of the students whom I observed. Their flagrant lack of success in academic area was not balanced by success in any other areas of their life to the degree

which would have been necessary to be compensatory.

Therefore, to state the obvious, it was not a compensation for them, nor a pleasant or safe feeling for them, to find themselves in a situation in which the group to which they must belong was one in which a prerequisite for membership was failure.

Possibly the conditions for inclusion in the group in which these high school students with learning disabilities found themselves was the reason that in observing them as a class, as a group, I found myself watching a situation defined by shadows rather than shapes. That is, these students, in trying to avoid the group in which they had no choice but to belong, and in which failure was the password, began to define themselves by allowing themselves to have as little definition as possible. The lack of clarity which ran through their lives probably made it possible for them to exist in this sort of state or half-presence. In many ways one sensed that they had pasts which were not definable to them and that the notion of a future existed only in vague terms if at all. Even their present lives seemed to be beads of time which were never strung together.

Learning to read is of terrible importance in the life of the school child. Bettelheim (1982) state:

The ability to read is of such singular importance in a child's life in school that his experience in learning more often than not seals the fate, once and for all, of his academic career. ...If the child did not know it before, it will soon be impressed on him that of all school learning, nothing compares in importance with reading: it is of unparalleled significance... The way in which learning to read is experienced by the child will determine how he will view learning in general, how he will conceive of himself as a learner and even as a person. (p. 5)

Bloome (1987, p. 330) echoes and expands upon this idea when he notes:

The possession of fully functional literacy correlates with economic and social success in our culture, in spite of the fact that exceptions can be found; the term literate and illiterate are reflective of how our society views and values people and how people in our society value themselves. Feelings and attitudes constitute a significant dimension of literacy and cannot be ignored.

The power of these statements in relation to the importance of reading and writing in terms of school life, economic life, social life, and personal identity were referenced in the outcome literature discussed previously in this dissertation. The literature indicated that some adults who had been identified as learning disabled achieved success in their adult lives (Bruck, 1985; Cobb & Crump, 1984; Obringer & Isenhood, 1986). However, much research (Spren, 1987; Rogan & Harman, 1976; Hoffman et al., 1987; Fraunheim & Heckerl, 1983) has concluded that many areas of adult lives are diminished by the impact of reading and writing difficulties.

Difficulty in learning to read and write creates a situation in which, in terms of the school world, one becomes a deviant. In the case of students who do not read well, it is unlikely that they actually deviated intentionally. That is, there was no conscious decision to stop learning to read. In fact, as little children who took out picture books and first readers along with all of their classmates, there is little doubt that they had no wish to fail, or be deviant. They wished to read along with everyone else. The fact that their reading and writing skills, and/or social skills and/or language skills were not considered to be of an average level by those watching them learn created the sense of deviance, a sense which was then tested and confirmed as real, when these students were measured against their peers. Whether labeled as learning disabled or not, the presence of this deviance would probably have been noticed by both the students themselves and by those engaged in learning activities with these students.

Deviance may be looked at in a way in which the characteristics of the deviating individual become the focus. Or it may be seen as a process of response and counterresponse through which behavior takes on social meaning. In the latter approach, which is termed the labeling approach to deviance, the orientation emphasizes one key point: "'Deviant' individuals and situations

involving deviant behavior result not simply from discrete acts of wrongdoing or departure from norms; they reflect patterns and processes of social definition" (Schur, 1971, p. 4). "The deviant person is one whose role, status, function and self-definition are importantly shaped by how much deviation he engages in, by the degree of its social visibility, by the particular exposure he has to the societal reaction, and by the nature and strength of the societal reaction" (Schur, 1971, p. 10).

Stereotyping which occurs, as at least a partial function of labeling, is discussed in terms of those who are blind. Although the blind have not intentionally deviated, nonetheless, they represent to society a deviation. Expectations of the blind assume a uniformity of adjustment among those who are blind which denies the diversity of characteristics of these individuals. One of the important consequences of these stereotypical responses is that whether they are erroneous or not, those who are blind cannot ignore them and they effect their behavior (Schur, 1971).

This study indicated that those who are identified as learning disabled and who have difficulty in the areas of reading and writing are confronted, as a result of their deviance, with many of the same difficulties which were described as happening to those who are blind and more generally to those who are deviant in many of the possible

ways one can be deviant. An added dimension of this situation occurs because those who are learning disabled, unlike those who are blind, are in some ways invisible as members of a group. Often a learning disability is referred to as an invisible handicap. It has been well documented that many people have managed to hide learning disabilities, particularly their inability to read and write, for large parts of their lives, even when they have held jobs in places in society which are considered to be of high status. The invisible nature of the handicap, the deviance, allows for the possibility of an odd type of posturing not always possible in other types of deviance and makes the existence of those with learning disabilities, within a group of students with similar problems, a confusing and sometimes convoluted situation to describe.

The students whom I observed, with few exceptions, did not want to be labeled, nor did they want to be removed from the regular class. Whether they were removed or not, they were different from most of their classmates because of their academic deficiencies. They were removed from the regular classroom because they were, in the opinion of those who were teaching them, not engaging in learning. Those making the decision to place them in a smaller group in order to allow them to receive more intense reading and writing instruction were also



responding to the fact that the students were freshmen and sophomores in high school. They were aware time was running out in terms of opportunity the high school setting for development of the students' reading and writing abilities. The teachers were responding to their awareness of the deviation of these students from the normal ability of students to acquire reading and writing skills. While the welfare of the students was without a doubt foremost on their minds, other responses to the deviance surely played into their decisions. The credibility and accountability of themselves as teachers and the school as an institution of learning was a part of the picture, a part of the decision. Certainly the decision reflected a belief on the part of the teachers, an expectation that these students were capable of greater achievement in reading and writing and that another setting would provide other options different from those of the larger regular classroom setting. Although it was not made up entirely of students with special education handicapping conditions, it was primarily composed of those who were not interested in school or not doing very well in school.

#### Language

Language difficulties interfered with instruction in these sections. I have learned from observations made in

this study that one is not always aware of the presence of language until one is faced with its absence. Although the ability of a student to spell "come" or to add  $25 + 25$  is sometimes more a obvious difficulty on which we immediately focus, the inability to use language in various ways is sometimes a more hidden, but nevertheless serious, difficulty. In almost all classrooms spoken language is the medium through which concepts are presented and discussed, student understanding is expressed and judged. An understanding of pragmatic language allows students to interact socially, another important aspect of the classroom, particularly when it is viewed as a community.

There are many dimensions of language. Language is made up of sounds, speech rhythms and patterns, syntax (combinations of words into phrases), and language discourse (combinations of sentences into higher order units such as paragraphs and narratives). Students need to understand these components of language and also be able to develop metalinguistic capabilities in order to analyze and understand their own language use. All of these language abilities become part of receptive language, expressive language, and written language (including reading and writing) and are aspects of language with which students must develop some facility (Glover, Ronning, & Bruning, 1990).

Language use is also intertwined with thought and reflection. Vygotsky (1978) explains the relationship between thought and word by saying that, "The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought... Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them" (p. 218). He notes that some language lies beyond the semantic plane. This speech, which he calls inner speech, is speech for itself, as opposed to external speech, which is speech for others. With inner speech there is no need to defend one's position; the mutual perception is always there. When inner speech occurs, thoughts are not always able to be put into words. As an example of this difficulty, Vygotsky quoted a character from a novel of Uspensky's who says of his thoughts, "It is as if they are all here, in my head, but cannot slip from the tongue." Vygotsky concludes his chapter on thought and word with the idea that all consciousness is connected with the development of the word. Chomsky (1975) closely reflects the ideas of Vygotsky when he says he wishes to study language in part because language is a mirror of the mind and a product of human intelligence.

In the high school classroom in which I observed, the dearth of language which I witnessed was striking and had a pervasive impact on all of the happenings of the class

and on the school life of the students. Sacks (1989) refers to language as a means to transfer our culture. Bruner (1990) discusses the use of language as a symbolic system which allows us to pass on culture. In both of these descriptions, the importance of language far surpasses the immediate and superficial aspects of hearing, seeing and writing words, which we may often consider when we are observing and analyzing classroom events. In the high school classroom in which I observed, the deficient language abilities which I witnessed were striking and had a pervasive impact on students' school lives. As I have depicted in anecdotes, students had difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings to one another. They spoke in short phrases and single word responses. The lack of descriptors was noticeable. Sometimes students did not respond at all to statements and questions made by others. It was difficult to tell whether they had simply not heard, whether they had not understood, or whether they were simply not interested.

In instances of more formal language interactions such as spoken directions, students often needed repetition as well as a presentation of visual models in order to understand assignments. Any change in the course of the assignment often called for another set of explanations. When students did not understand, they

would sometimes simply sit until a teacher or another student pointed out that the student was not working. Responses to questions posed by teachers were often as terse as the responses of students to the conversational questions of their peers. Sometimes teachers both asked and answered their own questions.

In general, the silence was odd. Much contact was made through non-verbal gestures. For example, when a student needed help from another student, he/she would grab the other student's paper. Help from a teacher was often obtained through the use of a word such as, "Hey." Acquisition of both primary and secondary discourse as discussed by Gee (1992) still seemed lacking at the high school level of these students.

Word recall was also an issue which made the language of these students odd. Often they had difficulty retrieving words or labels. This was true of both proper and improper nouns. One interesting example was the difficulty they had throughout the year with the names of the teachers. (This did not appear to be disrespect or discourteousness.) They often called Jean without using her name. Toward the end of the year, a student attempting to receive help on an assignment, called out my name. When I did not immediately look up, he said with a look of confusion, "Your name is Judy, isn't it?"

Records of three of the four students in the case studies indicated that they had been referred for language help in first grade. Because they were in self-contained rooms, most help was described as occurring in that setting. Evidence of continued difficulty in the areas of both receptive and expressive language development was most obvious in interviews with Todd and Joel. (Although this might have resulted in their lack of interest in interacting with me, it was very typical of the language which I heard them use when speaking with others.) In both cases, students had to be prodded to answer in more than a sentence, although Todd's language was more fluent than Joel's. Joel's lack of fluency, his difficulty in framing his responses and his problem expanding on statements was typical of the language which I heard daily. His tendency to answer a question after a delay, or after a new topic had been introduced, was also typical of the type of language interaction which I heard in the classrooms daily.

Amy's spoken language, while not as deficient as that of the boys, was sometimes disconnected and unexpansive. She sometimes spoke abruptly (such as blurting out, "I need a man.") and was sometimes unfocused and went off on tangents. The lack of expansiveness was much more noticeable when she was combining spoken and written language, than when she was simply speaking. There was,

however, more spontaneity and natural affect in the language of Amy than was heard in other students whom I observed. Both in class and during our talks, Amy also displayed more interest in and ability to attend to what I was saying than many of the students (both male and female whom I observed).

Similarly, Beth displayed good pragmatic skills in class and when specifically speaking with me. She was able to use language to reflect on her life and her reflections were quite expansive and fluid. She listened with interest to me and responded appropriately to my questions. Beth used language to engage both socially and in terms of academic discourse. Although Beth would not be considered to have a strong vocabulary, it was adequate in a social situation, though less adequate relative to reading vocabulary and sophisticated written expression. Beth was much less typical of the students in Sections I and II than other students depicted in these case studies.

Not only did language interfere with students' ability to learn but it also, I believe, caused the teachers to modify their language output. This modification of language had important implications because it is possible that language is often modified by teachers when interacting with students who have difficulty with language use and that this modification is not conscious, but rather becomes routine, therefore

feeding into the already sparse exposure to language which is part of the life of these students. While I was focusing more on the language of the students in this study than on that of the teachers, my observations indicate that language use on the part of the teachers was often concrete in choice of words and somewhat limited in use of complex sentences and lengthy responses to questions or in social discourse on general subjects. This is not to imply that teachers did not give answers which were associative in nature or take the time to answer questions by using maps or encyclopedias, or common experiences to explain the meaning of words or to find ways to explain issues in readings. However, it is possible that some modification of language use occurred in the discourse modes unconsciously chosen by all teachers when interacting with these students, heightening difficulties in increasing general language knowledge when there is a relatively homogeneous group of students whose receptive and productive language is at least somewhat limited. (However, it is important to note that when there is more heterogeneous grouping, though there may be more complex language output and greater chance for exposure to complex language and varied vocabulary, students may simply not understand much of what is being said.)



### Academic Progress and Instructional Needs of Students

The students whom I observed were still considerably behind in acquisition of reading and writing skills after years of instruction. Their progress during the year observed them was inconsistent. Spache (1976) discusses the difficulties in defining progress and measuring long term effects of remediation and questions actual positive long-term effects. Some outcome literature reviewed in this dissertation indicated academic progress was made by students with learning disabilities (Balow & Blomquist, 1965; Bruck, 1985; Herjanic & Penick, 1972). Much literature (Frauenheim & Heckerl, 1983; Johnson & Blalock, 1987; Spreen, 1987; Hoffman et al, 1987) found serious academic deficiencies remained in adults who had been diagnosed as learning disabled.

While reasons for limited academic progress remain unclear, the literature often claimed that instructional practices have been unsound because they were based on discrete skills instruction. Poor choice of curriculum materials, because they were not seen by students as related to their lives, were also pointed to as reasons for students' lack of engagement in learning (Johnston, 1985; Kos, 1991; Fairbanks, 1992).

According to Ellis and Friend (1991), however, instructional models which make instruction as explicit as possible have the greatest empirical support for teaching

adolescents with learning difficulties. Explicit instruction is instruction which is defined by these authors as that in which the teacher ensures that students are well informed about what is expected of them, what is being learned, why it is being learned, and how it can be used. In accordance with Ellis and Friend (1991), Chall and Curtis (1991) state that, "For those not at risk, a facilitative but noninterventionist view of literacy may be effective. But, for children at risk, a formal, 'direct' kind of instruction, aimed at building on their strengths while addressing their needs, has been shown to be the most beneficial" (p. 354).

My observations in this study support the findings of Ellis and Friend (1991) and Chall and Curtis (1991). Students in Sections I and II seemed to function best when there was a routine and when instruction was direct. Although Jean's goal for the future was to create situations in which students could gradually gain independence, at the conclusion of this study they still seemed to need much direction. Students seemed to require "adult guidance" in the Vygotskian sense in order to progress academically and personally. Lack of academic progress was not seen as a result of poor instructional practice but rather as a result of a myriad of factors. Some of these factors have already been discussed and some

of them combine in a way that makes them difficult to differentiate.

Besides the factors already discussed, the following factors also impacted negatively on learning. Students often lacked basic skills, such as a sight vocabulary and awareness of phonics. They seemed to have little awareness of the processes involved in the learning tasks which they were attempting to accomplish. This lack of awareness and their limited access to basic skills hindered their ability to be engaged in the reading and writing tasks and also made it difficult for them to repeat them and build upon them. Their learning difficulties also appeared to be influenced by problems in their personal lives. They had difficulty accepting their reading and writing deficiencies and their language problems. Some of their learning difficulties appeared to stem from their inability to work independently or vice versa. None of the reasons which have been identified as hindering their success could have been eradicated by a simple change in instructional technique or curriculum materials. Difficulties were pervasive, too embedded in students' self-perceptions, and too complex.

Some students in this study saw their instruction as meaningful. This meaning was measured more by their ability to see progress in their reading and writing rather than by an association between materials and their

lives. Progress was seen to exist when reading and writing was easier for them and when they obtained good grades with limited help. Other students saw instruction and assignments as parts of life which highlighted their deficiencies and made them feel worthless. It seems reasonable to conjecture that after years of academic efforts which produced limited progress, the students had never obtained a level of mastery necessary for the automaticity of reading and writing skills which would have empowered them and assisted them in making their lives fulfilling. While students might condemn their instruction, in retrospect (they did not express condemnation in my presence), that condemnation could easily be seen as a way of maintaining self-worth. (If instruction was fine, how could they be so deficient?)

Delpit (1991) advocated the use of explicit instruction in terms of conventions and strategies as the best way to allow students out of the mainstream of society to have access to the power of the mainstreamed society. She defined conventions as the kind of language that is used in circles that can produce change and strategies as "processes that literate people consciously control which allow them to comprehend and control text" (p. 541). She explained through many examples the importance of explicit teaching of the dominant culture in order to allow some power with and access to the dominant

culture. She pointed out that teaching the dominant discourse required an understanding of the necessity of actually directly instructing students in primary and secondary discourses (Gee, 1989), discourses which students are often assumed to acquire without direct instruction.

Delpit's descriptions of valuable instruction for those out of the mainstream are supported by my observations of students in this study. Explicit instruction which answered their need to engage in society's discourse was of most value to students. However, arriving at ways in which to help students directly engage with materials and progress required constant mediation on the part of teachers.

#### Expectations/Standards

Expectations and standards which indicated belief that students could be expected to achieve and would be empowered through reading and writing ability were also imperative to their academic and personal growth regardless of the impact of intervening factors. Delpit (1991) warned of her belief that many who had mastered the discourse often became less direct and explicit in instruction because of the mistaken notion that too much direction only heightened the prevalence of an imbalance of power. In fact, she explained it only exacerbates the

imbalance by creating a situation in which those who had not mastered the discourse were not helped to do so.

My observations again supported these statements of Delpit. When direction was lacking, students in this study floundered and became less and less engaged. The lack of engagement which was already present became worse because of the difficulty which these students had in seeing a relationship between tasks and learning. For example, in the case study interview of Joel, he stated that he would probably get full credit for his math course (although he had only gone for part of the year) because the principal knew his brother.

School personnel pointed out in interviews that often students who had trouble reading and writing were given few assignments requiring these skills. Therefore, their school life allowed little practice, and practice is, of course, necessary for progress. The students' lack of engagement and direction, along with the expectations and requirements of some of their instructors created an oddly circular pattern which fed failure. When demands were made on students (for example, in the resource room), they became angry stating that, "English is when you look up words" (nothing more) and asking why they should have to do so much work when other teachers did not make them.

In general, I saw standards and expectations frequently expressed in the resource room. However,

sometimes these were modified by feelings of concern by teachers and staff that students whose lives seemed already burdened to the breaking point could simply not bear another demand. Sometimes expectations and standards were inhibited because of the surprise with which students viewed them and because of their resistance to them. Some of the resistance was the result of a lack of engagement due to their inability to see results of their work. Some seemed to stem from attempts at hiding, some came from the perpetual lack of progress which pervaded their academic lives and their consequent attitude of "then why try?" Some of the resistance resulted from the fact that they saw expectations being set for them by the resource room as unusual and different from those to which they were exposed in much of the rest of their school experience. Students had few homework assignments and reading was a minimal part of their school experience. When I asked Amy if she had a textbook for the class (the only class which she seemed to imply used one at all), she replied that they did but they never used it. As she said, "Waste of a good book."

The students whom I observed appeared to feel defeated. Part of the reason for the sense of defeat seemed to come from the fact that they had a greater need than some for explicitness of instruction, an explicitness which is not always seen as a positive educative

contribution. Their defeatedness also seemed to result, partially, from the fact that they were trapped by a learned helplessness which caused them to see no reason to expect that there would be results from their work, but also from poor ego identities which caused them at most times to disengage from learning so that they would not be seen as failures. Rose (1990) says that there is a neurophysiology to intelligence but there is also a feeling to it. While by neurophysiological standards the students whom I observed were, with few exceptions, of average intellectual ability, they seemed to have a "feeling" about their intelligence which made them classify themselves as inferior. This feeling pervaded their school lives. This feeling made their school lives different from the lives of many other students, a difference which continually disempowered them. All of these factors made it hard for those who instructed them to maintain any reasonable expectations of them.

#### Futures

Rose (1990) claims, "But, strange blessing, we can never really free ourselves from the mood of early neighborhoods, from our first stories, from the original tales of hope and despair" (p. 240). Much of the literature reviewed in this study revealed difficult futures for many students with learning disabilities. This study indicates that the students observed also



predicted limited futures for themselves. Very possibly this was at least partly the result of the fact that the students were unable to free themselves from "original tales of hope and despair." Possibly it was partly the result of the discontinuity in many of their present lives, or possibly a result of their difficulty in reflection and lack of understanding of cause and effect which would allow them to believe that they had control over their lives.

The students' futures were not frequently discussed openly in the resource room when I was present. My evidence through classroom observation of the pervasiveness of students' lack of expectations for their futures was limited. My strongest argument that they lacked expectations is based on inference from the results of case study interviews. My observations strongly indicated that in students' personal lives they had limited access to resources of knowledge, and of ways to access knowledge. They also seemed to have an even more limited sense that they had control over what was happening in either their academic or personal lives.

The limited access to resources was caused, for example, by a lack of books at home and by the experiences to which they were exposed. For example, when I suggested to one student that he should read more at home, he looked at me with a kind of head-shaking tolerance at my lack of

understanding. He said, "We live in one room. How many books do you think I have there?" In the anecdotes I described Todd's surprise that there was a magazine store downtown. Joel had no idea how to find the address of any of those to whom he wished to send his political letters, nor his father's, though he very much wished to be in contact with him. When I asked whether he could find out if he had a little more time, he simply shrugged, no, in a kind of defeated way. Many of the students had experienced lives of frequent disruption. When they discussed what was to happen next, where they would live, etc., they were at a loss to predict. The extreme example of this was the student who waited expectantly and with great tension for a good part of the end of the year to go to court to find out where he was to live next. When he discussed the situation with Jean, he would appear either frenzied or depressed; while he understood that he was going to be able to say what he felt, he seemed to have little sense of the reality of what would probably happen (according to Jean's knowledge of the situation).

Although in my general experience in life, these examples appear extreme, in my observations of most of the students in Sections I and II, they were typical and standard.

School personnel frequently expressed their fears that students with learning disabilities had tenuous futures because of their difficulty with academic skills,

their lack of knowledge of life skills (such as how to sign a form), their resistance to seek help in these areas, and their inability to have goals. One staff member interviewed said with frustration, a hint of sarcasm, and considerable sadness (as stated in interview data) that she predicted that these students would end up being controlled by institutions (such as welfare, city organizations, etc.).

Answers which students in case studies gave when I questioned them about their futures were representative of the expectations of the students in this study. Beth was most atypical since she had a desire to attend college and a belief that this could happen. Amy wanted to be a singer and a model and emphasized that she must have a man in her life at all times. She also said that sometimes she thought about being an inventor, but attempted to explain that she reminded herself that it was important to be realistic when she had such thoughts. Joel could only think of having a house and a car, but had little hope of obtaining these. Todd, when asked about his future, said he couldn't see himself as having a future; he could see himself on the streets. When I asked him why, he said that he couldn't think of himself as capable of doing any particular jobs.

### Summary - Findings

This study was conducted in order to gain an understanding of the school lives of high school students with learning disabilities. Two resource room sections were observed. Case studies of four of the students from these sections were also developed. The students had all had reading and writing problems throughout their school lives, and with one exception began to receive remedial help in early elementary school. Many had been in self-contained classrooms. Several had been involved in individual and family counseling throughout their school lives. Despite intervention, all had achievements which were well below their peers in reading and writing at the time they entered high school. As high school students they were in regular classes and in a small resource room reading class.

As literature regarding the identification of students with learning disabilities indicated, those identified as learning disabled who were observed in this study were not a homogeneous group. In the resource room sections which I observed, students ranged in intellectual capacity from well below average to the high end of average. Their reading and written language capacities ranged from approximately second/third grade to sixth/seventh grade levels. To view them as a homogeneous group is misleading in terms of educational planning. In order

that educational planning be effective, it must rest upon a perception of these students as individuals with specific and often different needs.

As much of the outcome research regarding students with learning disabilities concluded, data collected in this study also indicates that the school lives of these students were, for the most part, bleak. Although this study was not directed at observations and analysis of their personal lives, it was hard not to infer that their lives outside of school must also reflect the bleakness of their school lives (or vice versa). Whether they themselves perceived their lives as bleak or not was not revealed by this study. This was in part due to the fact that, in many cases, students did not appear to reflect upon their lives. This was most clearly explained by the statement made by the guidance counselor I interviewed, when she stated that she did not think that they necessarily had the dual perspective that we assumed. As she said,

It may be that many kids aren't excited about school and don't have a good feeling about school, but they may not connect that feeling with the fact that they are struggling so much more with the way learning is taking place in school. It's their life experience, so for them school is just an unhappy place to be because they rarely experience success. They don't know what it feels like not to be that way, so I don't know that they feel a sense of loss; probably it's just more that they generalize about education and school and even some of the college kids who have

tremendously supportive families, who know what a learning disability is, who work with it and still have that frustration. They still are not having a happy school experience.

Many, though not all, of the students whom I observed were frustrated and angry. Most saw themselves as different and deficient people because of their reading and writing difficulties. All of them spent much of their time keeping guard over the secret of these difficulties. They were for the most part not engaged in their learning and often seemed not to be engaged in life. Although they were sometimes aggressive in their actions, there was a general passivity which seemed to pervade their school and personal existence. They seemed to take for granted that they had no control over what had happened, was happening, or would happen to them. Some of this lack of engagement and passivity seemed to be the result of difficulties in all areas of language which separated them from others in a way which might not be immediately obvious. Their reading and writing difficulties also separated them and the need to keep secret their academic deficiencies caused them to be even more remote.

Reading and writing demands pervaded the school lives of these students, even when expectations were lowered. Their inability to read and write well interfered with learning and self-confidence in all subject areas. The students cared whether or not they succeeded. They cared

whether or not they learned. They often felt humiliated and inadequate as people, not only as students. They saw reading and writing and success on tests as indications of their personal worth.

The students in this study spent large amounts of their school lives hiding their academic deficiencies. This used up much energy and time. Avoiding reading and writing tasks was one of the most obvious ways in which students hid. They hid by being unpleasant when teachers offered to help them with work. They hid by staring for long periods of time at books, pretending to read. They hid by signing on lines which they could not read rather than ask for help. As one of the school staff said, "They would rather risk drinking poison than ask for help reading the label on a bottle."

Students in the study saw little cause and effect relationship in events. There was little sense that if you practiced reading, reading would improve. There was little sense that working hard and completing an assignment was required to receive a good grade. There was little sense that making plans would allow an event to occur. Whether their limited success in endeavors was the whole reason for the difficulty which they had in seeing the relationship between actions and events, it was most probably at least part of the reason.

There was often little engagement on the part of the students with their work. This lack of engagement could not simply be explained by the fact that their academics had little to do with their lives, or that curriculum materials are not educationally sound or appropriate. Nor was it reasonable to consider this lack of engagement to be the result of poor teaching. That too, of course, may sometimes have been a factor. The lack of engagement seemed also to have been the result of other factors. Lack of engagement might in part have been a reflection of the limited value which was placed on school at home. It might also have been the result of having so rarely succeeded on assignments, that there was often little connection seen between doing the work and learning. This lack of engagement was routine; students seemed to have no notion that there was another way.

The language problems which were documented in the records of many of the students in this study continued to be detrimental to academic and social aspects of their school lives. The students had difficulty interacting with their peers and with the adults with whom they worked. They were unable to use expressive, receptive and pragmatic language in order to get requests about everyday things such as homework assignments or help with classroom exercises. When interacting with peers, they often spoke in phrases or sentences that were non sequiturs. In



formal interviews which I conducted, students were not able to expand on ideas. They were often unable to answer my question at all; they would change the topic or look confused about what I was asking.

Difficulties in the home lives of most of the students in this study pervaded their school lives and interfered with their learning in ways which could not be overlooked. Their ability to focus attention on learning, their problems with claiming a personal identity (with having a past and a future), and the reactions of educators to the awareness of the students' difficulties were all at least partially the result of these difficulties. To assume that these difficulties are left at the threshold at home is unrealistic.

These students appeared to make little progress when they worked on their own. Structure and routine seemed to help in allowing progress in learning. They often had difficulty making associations in learning and, therefore, frequently required concrete explanations. Their level of reading and writing was so minimal that they could not interact with materials without frequent mediation. Otherwise they made the same mistakes over and over. Their difficulty with reading and writing and the way in which they associated these subjects with failure and humiliation made most assignments unpleasant, further hindering independent work. When the task was mediated,

they seemed to enjoy the tasks and their accomplishments more.

Expectations and standards for these students were often minimal. There seemed to be several reasons for this. Regular classroom teachers recognized that there were many academic tasks which were difficult for these students, so they eliminated many of them. Teachers stated that students often did not do homework, so they stopped giving it to them. In the resource room fairly high standards were set. However, students seemed to be shocked by these expectations; this made it more problematic for those who set high standards to follow through with them. The resistance of these students was often strong and their well-developed avoidance tactics were firmly in place. Family problems which were frequently revealed by the students when at school also interfered with expectations. For example, teachers would find it difficult to give a student a demanding and often frustrating reading task on the heels of the student's disclosure that he/she would be moving to yet another foster home. In many cases, the students had failed so many times that there was an understated expectation on the part of teachers that they would continue to do so. When this did not occur in a classroom, one might be criticized as a teacher because, for example, you had given a good grade to a student who usually received all

failing grades. For example, Jean once explained that she had felt guilty at a meeting when all teachers stated that they had failed a student and she admitted that she had not.

The teachers, paraprofessional, administrators and counselors working with these students were knowledgeable and they cared. There were those who did not; however, they were the exception. Those who worked with the students were worried. They saw them as vulnerable. They wanted them to succeed. In many cases they wanted to be able to fix the students' lives. This caring carried with it a burden of feeling. They realized how difficult it would be to help the students to have more fulfilling lives.

The teachers, administrators, and support staff who worked with them were often saddened by their knowledge of the problematic personal and school lives of the students. They were sometimes so frustrated and angry that they could not "fix" the school and personal lives of the students. Their thoughts and feelings regarding the students' lives influenced their interactions with the students.

This study highlights the notions that learning and education are complex. The statements made about the education of the high school students with learning disabilities in this study are in many cases both

particular and universal. The multitude of factors which go into the education of these students are not easy to differentiate. They are even less easy to explain. Factors are always intertwined. This study brings into bold relief the fact that changing and/or improving educational practice is enormously difficult; changing and/or improving lives is even more difficult.

The story of part of the school lives of the Section I and Section II classes and of Amy and Beth and Todd and Joel is a story which is excerpted from the story of the rest of their lives, from their pasts and from their futures. It is not a story which tells of school lives which are enviable. Nor is it a story which, as it unravels, reveals ways in which the lives of students are changed or transformed. It is not a story in which praise and blame can be meted out like classroom tokens of gold stars and black marks. In fact, it is a story in which the complexity of education becomes so obvious that even correctly defining the term, education, begins to seem unimaginable. As the story ends, and the lives of the students continue, their futures seem as blank and confusing as their descriptions of their pasts.

The end of a story often holds comments about the future. Fairy tales sometimes end with, "They lived happily ever after." I would not use that sentence to end this story. It is hard to assume a happily ever after

future for students who do not see themselves as having one. Most of these students seem to see the future as something which will happen to them rather than something which they could have some part in making happen. Even the concept of the future does not seem to be part of who they are. To not have a future is an appalling thought at best. Certainly, if the assumption is made that reading and writing are important in life, then the students whom I observed will have limited futures, limited lives. If it is hard for some of the students to use a restroom in a restaurant unless it has a picture on the door, in what other ways will the lives of these students be modified?

When Irene spoke of her interviews with these students in her role as a guidance counselor, she said:

I'm thinking about kids who cannot even be inspired to dream a goal, even in a fantasy kind of thing... If you cannot even think of a dream and we all have to settle for less than our dream, then where does that leave you?

Of course, no story should end on such a note. And since the school lives of these students are not at an end, this story can actually stop without an ending. Since, as the narrator of the story, I am no longer part of the school lives of these students, I have the luxury of offering recommendations from a position which is relatively removed.

### Implications

There are several implications to this study. First of all, we owe all students every last bit of our effort to insure that they have a future. If reading and writing are a means to a future which has dreams as a part of it, then we owe them every last bit of our effort, during their school lives, to help them to acquire these skills. We are no longer talking about owing students academic skills training; we are talking about owing them a future. We owe them every chance at language development and reflection, every chance to not carry around secrets of academic difficulties which become their "chorus of stones." We owe them the chance to see themselves as having more than limited value because of these deficiencies. All of us who, with little effort, incorporate society's legacy of language, written and spoken, owe our best efforts to these children, those high school students who do not yet have this legacy.

When decisions are made regarding the necessity of labeling students as having a learning disability, it is important to keep in mind that having significant reading and writing difficulties is at best differentiating and at worst stigmatizing whether or not a student is actually identified as having a learning disability. When educational planning occurs for students with learning disabilities, it is important to recognize that, although

they may be identified using the same label of learning disabilities, they may have very different individual potentials, abilities, and needs.

In planning for high school students with learning disabilities, strengths and weaknesses in areas of language development should be carefully assessed and educational, social and personal implications considered. Therefore, curriculum planning should include instruction and reinforcement in language development. The impact which their family problems have upon the lives of students cannot be ignored. The impact of these problems on the school lives of these students must be considered if academic progress is not to be compromised.

Educators should be reminded that students with learning difficulties spend large amounts of their school lives hiding so that they will not be humiliated. There does not seem to be a simple solution to this problem. Pre-teaching and frequent reinforcement of large group lessons in one on one or small group settings will help to gain confidence and practice with less chance of public betrayal of their difficulties.

Students often need one on one instruction or very small group instruction and reinforcement of reading and writing and other academic subjects. Often when they work independently, without mediation, they practice their mistakes. The lack of engagement of these students in

their learning may also require instruction which is specific and directed. Relating curriculum to their lives does not always cause them to be engaged in tasks such as reading and writing which are of such difficulty to them. Accomplishments need to be frequently acknowledged and ways in which students are learning must be frequently informally evaluated in order to determine how learning can best be mediated and students allowed to see their successes.

Solutions to the learning problems of these students cannot be easily prescribed. Although some accommodations are necessary, expectations must be clear and constantly reexamined. Challenges are important to these students. Certainly Rex Brown was correct in saying that all students can learn, but for some students, learning to read and write is very difficult. This does not mean that efforts should be abandoned. The complexity of issues contributing to their problems cannot be oversimplified. Therefore, neither can solutions. To do so is to diminish the students, the educators and the process of learning.

In Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, James Agee asked that his readers appreciate their next meal. I ask that you appreciate your next meal. I ask that you appreciate your next reading passage and written communication and that you wish to share your good fortune. At the end of this research study, I, and those whom I met who work with



high school students with learning disabilities, do not wish or hope for a fairy tale ending to the lives of these students. We simply assume that the students have every right to a bright future and a substantial dream and we wish to see to it that they do.

### Limitations

There are several limitations that readers must consider as they review this work.

This study was conducted in a resource room setting. Two sections of students were observed. Since the literature regarding the definition of students with learning disabilities indicates that this population is very heterogeneous, results of this study cannot be generalized to all high school students who have been identified as learning disabled. The students in Section I had been pulled from a regular English class to which they had originally been assigned. The students in Section II had been assigned to the class during the previous year by the teachers because they were thought to work well as a group and be quite motivated to learn. Replication of this study would require that researchers be aware of these particular student definitions, as well as others which have been defined in the Methodology section of this paper. Degree of external validity in

this study would also be a factor which was related to the specificity of the population which was observed.

Internal validity in qualitative research is partially dependent upon the researcher's access to data. In this study I was easily able to negotiate entry into the setting due to the cooperation of the teachers and other school staff with whom I was in most immediate contact. However, in this study my relationship with the students in Section I was not an easy relationship. They did not appear to trust me; they were not always comfortable in sharing ideas and feelings with me. Their apparent difficulties with language also limited the data which could be collected through means of either formal or informal interviewing of students. Although I was able to develop a more trusting relationship with students in Section II, in most cases difficulty with their language skills interfered with the quality of my formal and informal interviews with them.

In this study there was limited and incidental evidence that male students interacted differently with male teachers. In this study I did not attempt to investigate whether the interactions between teachers and students might have differed as a function of working with men teachers as opposed to women teachers. In this study the students were observed in a setting in which the curriculum was largely traditional. I did not try to

consider the experiences which these students might have had if their literacy instruction had been addressed through a less traditional curriculum. Kozol (1991) would argue that socioeconomic status has tremendous effect on opportunities and how they are understood. There was some evidence in this study that students whose parents were empowered had greater opportunity for success in school. I did not explore this question in this study. Factors which I have listed above as limitations, as well as many other factors, influence students' success.

Despite these limitations, I believe that the method of triangulation used in this study involving participant observation, informal and formal interviews with teachers and other school staff, and record searches enhanced the internal reliability of this study. It is also my belief that, despite limitations related to external validity, many of the conclusions of this study may be generalized to much of the population of high school students who have had severe reading and writing difficulties throughout their school lives. While those issues should be viewed as limitations of this study, they offer grounds for other studies in which influences on school success could be investigated.

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