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The Characteristics of High School Transition Programs That Assist Learning Disabled Students To Succeed at the Post-Secondary Level

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Abstract

When students with learning disabilities (LD) move from a high school environment

in which they are often carefully guided to a setting in post-secondary education, where

they are expected to achieve on their own, they may encounter transition difficulties.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the transition programs in place in high

school for six successful students with learning disabilities who were enrolled in an

institution on a post-secondary level and to measure the effectiveness of the practices of

those programs in conjunction with internal characteristics that students brought with

them to that environment.   The outcome of the study was to investigate the effectiveness

of those transition programs that might have ultimately enhanced participants' transition

adjustments including academic, social, and personal.

The participants were interviewed individually, given three sections of a written

questionnaire to fill out taken from a Transition Planning Inventory Student Form

developed by PRO-ED, Inc., in 1997, and asked a series of questions formulated by the

investigator. High School transition programs were compared to best practices of

transition programs, based on former research.

The nature of this study was descriptive. The information in this qualitative study

provides insight currently lacking in the literature on transition programs. It was

observed that one of the most significant factors in the success of LD students

transitioning to post-secondary education is each student's own measure of self-

determination, along with the transition program experienced in high school. There

was no attempt made by this investigator to prove or disprove the literature regarding transition services for LD students in high school. It was this investigator's hope that this study would illuminate some of the realities of transition programs and encourage the giving of credit where credit was due for success -- to the existing transition programs and to the individual students themselves.

Research Questions

1. Does the existence of transition services affect the post-secondary education of students with learning disabilities?

2. How do self-determination, the ability to communicate, and interpersonal relations contribute to the success or failure of LD students in post-secondary programs?

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Without the support of my family, I would never have considered doctoral school, but as usual, they thought I could do anything I wanted to do; and therefore, I did. The

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Chapter I

Introduction

As many as 130,000+ students with learning disabilities attend college in the United States, and that number is increasing (Matthews, Anderson, & Skolnick, 1987). Students with disabilities who enrolled in higher post-secondary education dramatically increased even more in the 90s. In the last decade alone, enrollment tripled (Henderson, 1995; Henderson, 1999) and the percentage of freshmen reporting a disability in any category jumped from 2.6% in 1978 to 9.2% in 1998 (Henderson, 1999). The disability category with the largest growth is learning disabilities (LD), quadrupling from 15.3% in 1988 to 67% in 1994 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1998; Henderson 1995; Henderson, 1999, National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Students with LD (learning disabilities) are no longer a rare phenomenon in higher education (Wertheim, Vogel, & Brulle, 1998).

The increase was spurred by Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975 and later by the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This was the first law enabling students with disabilities to acquire a free, public education from age 3 through high school graduation, or until age 21. The 1997 revised law continued to afford students with disabilities their rights. Due to the attention brought to this area of education, increased awareness and services provided by the IDEA, and identification of students having LD in public and private schools in the United States have greatly increased.

Students, with or without LD, who enroll in post-secondary education institutions do so because they think the experience will help them obtain gainful employment and skills necessary to survive independently after graduation (Boorstein, 1974). In 1998, Levine

and Nourse said that in the American society, it is more likely that individuals with college and university degrees will get the higher paying jobs that provide desired upward mobility (Levine & Nourse, 1998). That statement is supported by the United States Department of Education Strategic Plan 1998-2000 (1997), which reported workers with college degrees earned an average of 38% more, over a lifetime, than those who had only high school diplomas. The difference in earnings was estimated to be about 73% (Collet-Klingenberg, 1996).

When enrolling in a post-secondary institution, students with learning disabilities often move from an environment, where they were carefully guided, to a setting where they are expected to achieve on their own (Brinkerhoff, Shaw & McGuire, 1992). With proper transition services, students with LD should be able to learn the skills to become successful in post-secondary settings (Aase & Price, 1987; Bassett & Smith, 1996; Vogel & Adelman, 1990b). Many researchers say that for students with LD to be successful in post-secondary institutions, to graduate, and to have earning potential, a transition plan and services have to be provided during high school to prepare the students for post-secondary settings and the work force (Aase & Price, 1987; Aune, 1991; Baker & Blanding, 1985; Bassett & Smith, 1996; Dowdy, Carter, & Smith, 1990); Evelo & price, 1991; Getzel, 1990; Michaels, 1987; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1987; Scheiber & Talpers, 1985; Vogel; & Adelman, 1990b).

Historically, transition services have focused primarily on the needs of students with more severe cognitive and physical disabilities; whereas, students with LD were thought to possess the cognitive skills necessary to make the transition into adult life (Bassett & Smith, 1996). In truth, the process offers unique difficulties for persons with LD (Alley,

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Deshler, Clark, Schumaker, & Warner, 1983; Hallahan, Gajar, Cohen, & Tarver, 1978; Hershenson, 1984; Rosenthal, 1985; Tollefson ET Al, 1980). As professionals began to realize that learning disabilities do not disappear with age, but are chronic and lifelong, the transition efforts for students with LD began to increase (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994).

Research shows that students with LD who were associated with transition programs in high school are more likely to attend college than peers who are not associated with transition programs (Aune, 1991; Bassett & Smith, 1996;Dalke & Schmitt, 1987; Dowdy et al, 1990; Vogel & Adelman, 1990b). Even those associated with transition programs often report feeling unprepared to enter college, emotionally and academically (Dowdy et al., 1990). Many of the transition efforts are coordinated in high school by general educators and not by individuals trained in special education. It has been subsequently concluded that students with LD have often not received appropriate transitional services, and that high schools should do a better job with transition services for students with LD (Aune, 1991; Dalke & Schmitt, 1987; Dowdy et al., 1990).

Statement of the Problem

In order to enhance the support that students with LD need to transition to college, transition programs in high school should be improved. However, it has been noted that certain elements are necessary for a program in order for it to be of best help to LD students. The best practices in transition have a myriad of common factors. What the "best practices" really are needs to be examined, along with those characteristics that pre-dispose LD students for success in the first place. There is a major need for research and evaluation in this area. The *best practices* for one LD student may not be the *best*

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practices model that is needed for another LD student. The actual experiences with transition as exposed by the students themselves should be examined.

Specifically, the majority of the literature regarding transition practices for LD students in high school falls into two categories: (1) theoretical papers discussing assumed best practices and (2) research papers identifying supposed best practices. While both categories certainly contribute to the knowledge base, there exists little research on real-life practices and the effects of those practices on outcomes and experiences of LD students. This study represents a single effort to document actual transition practices with implications of a lack of programs now in existence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the high school transition programs of six students with LD who have successfully made the transition to college or university level, and to relate their experiences, personal characteristics, and common or uncommon attitudes, that may or may not have aided them in making the transition successfully.

In designing the evaluation, the literature on best practices for transition was considered. The first, or immediate outcome goal, was to identify the existing best practices in transition programs. The second, or intermediate outcome level goal, was to examine how the transition programs of the six students interviewed compared with those of established best practices. The third level, or ultimate goal, focused on examining those characteristics existing within the students that may have aided them in making a successful transition, in coordination with, or possibly, without their transition programs.

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Each level of outcome is dependent on the other for this study, providing a link for academic outcome and developmental change (Schwitzer, 1997).

The ultimate outcome for this evaluation study was to determine just what effect the transition programs, existing or non-existing, had on the students, and what common elements or characteristics existed, or did not exist within each of them, that pushed them on to success.

Research Questions:

1.   Does the existence of transition services in high school affect the post-secondary education of students with learning disabilities?

2.   How do self-determination, the ability to communicate, and interpersonal relations contribute to the success or failure of LD students in post-secondary programs?

Best Practices Serving Students with Learning Disabilities

Individuals with learning disabilities present a varied arena of needs in transition planning. Among other considerations, transition services must be broadened to assist individuals who desire to attend college or other post-secondary education programs (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987). Rojewski (1992) proposes three areas when considering program design for students with learning disabilities: (a) academic concerns, (b) social/personal concerns, and (c) vocational concerns. Within each of these areas support is needed to overcome any skill deficits and difficulties that the individual learner may experience. Rojewski points out that academic support is of utmost concern at the

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college level where student to teacher ratios are higher, teacher to students contact is lower, and demands are greater.

Mellard and Hazel (1992) agree that these three areas are of concern, but point out that the area of social competencies is most likely to have the biggest effect on the individual once he or she is out of school. They argue for increased transition planning and guidance at the secondary level. In addition, they suggest that too much time is spent on remedial academics at the expense of instruction on mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, and work skills.

In a review of nine transition programs for students with learning disabilities, seven components of best practices were identified (Rojewski, (1992). These include: (a) individualized planning, (b) vocational preparation, (c) academic re-mediation and support, (d) counseling, (e) support systems and services, (f) job seeking and placement, (g) follow-up and follow-up measures. Surprisingly, social skills did not serve as one of the components of best practice in Rojewki's review.

Before attempting to monitor and evaluate any program, it is essential to identify desired outcomes. Most research in transition focusing on post-school outcomes looks primarily at work related issues (Richards, 2000). Some research, however, considers other factors present in adult life including: living independently, social relationships, social and civic responsibility, and community access and use. While certainly all of these individual outcomes are important in considering the success of any transition program, there are more immediate outcomes at the program level that may indicate the effectiveness of transition programs. By using individual outcomes and relating them back to program activities and educational experiences, another measure of program

effectiveness is gained. A measure that includes, perhaps the most important yardstick of validity is individual perceptions.

In recent years, a number of outcome studies of individuals with learning disabilities have emerged that place greater emphasis on detailing post-school outcomes, characteristics or needs of learners, and relating these results back to program or educational services. Taken together, the suggested program outcomes and activities provided by Rusch et al. (1993) and Halpern (1992) provide a basis upon which to design a means of program evaluation that not only considers the immediate outcomes for the individual, but also reflects upon program outcomes and activities. A consideration of real life post-school outcomes for individuals with disabilities adds another dimension to this discussion of indicators of success.

Like Mithaug et al (1985), Shapiro and Lentz asked questions regarding post-school activities and educational needs. In addition, they asked students about personal references (e.g., parental occupation, marital status, living arrangements, frequency of contact with relatives, drug use, and help received after high school). The respondents in this study reported needing more training on job-related skills and an increase in academic skills training. Both the Mithuang et al. (1985) and the Shapiro and Lentz (1991) studies concluded that an important factor in post-school success may be parental support and involvement.

Due to the lack of substantial data-base on longitudinal activities and outcomes related to transition programs, the best practices reported in the literature on transition are those which have been either reported by program directors or surmised from transition related literature (including theoretical, discussion, and empirical work). There, one

contribution that the current investigation makes to literature is the addition of data on real life transition practices. The primary purpose of this investigation was to describe in depth the transition process of six students who successfully made the crossover to post-secondary education in a university, as found in Chapter IV.

The factors identified in the literature as key aspects of transition programs for students with LD fall into seven categories: (1) comprehensive planning, as part of the IEP process (Collet-Klingenburg, 1996); (2) vocational planning (Levinson, 1993); (3) skills training that is individualized, functional and takes place in natural settings (Kohler, 1993); (4) social skills (Foss, 1990; Mellard & Hazel, 1992; Kohler, 1993); (5) the involvement and collaboration of school and community agencies (Foss, 1990; Kohler, 1993); (6) academic support (Clark & Patton, 1997); and (7) involvement of the individual and his or her family in the transition process (Foss, 1990; Kohler, 1993). Additional categories specific to students with learning disabilities include an emphasis on post-secondary education as an option (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987), provision of counseling both during and following high school (Rojewski, 1992), and the availability of other support services following high school graduation (Rojewski, 1992).

By comparing the real-life practices in six students' experiences to the reported best practices in the literature, this study will serve as a small measure of social validity. To compare these findings with activities and outcomes in the current investigation will shed further light on the validity of the findings of the literature. McGrath (1982) argues that generalizability is not a strength of qualitative research, yet there exists support for the strength in numbers argument. By providing additional data regarding program activities and outcomes, an additional study has been contributed to the analytic generalization

(generalization of a particular set of results to a broader theory) (Yin, 1989) of reported best practices and indicators of successful transition programs. Additionally, by providing rich detail regarding the experiences of six students with learning disabilities who have successfully made the transition to a post-graduate institution, there is a possibility of case-to-case transfer, to be determined by the readers of the current investigation (Firestone, 1993).

Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study is that it adds to the limited literature related to successful transition programs available in high school for LD students at this time. Many professionals in the field have been advocating for improved transition education and services for a number of years. Education professionals need to become familiar with the reform agenda set forth in general education as well as in state and federal governments. Efforts for transition education must be fully integrated into the ongoing system change efforts in the overall educational system (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998).

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD0 (1994) expressed concern that many students with LD do not consider post-secondary educational options. A number of studies of the adult adjustment of individuals with disabilities (Fairweather & Shaver, 1991; Frank & Sitlington, 1997; Sitlington, Frank, and Carson, 1993; Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992) have found that young adults with disabilities do not have the same rate of enrollment in post-secondary education as individuals without disabilities. This is largely due to the lack of encouragement and assistance from friends, parents, and education professionals.

Despite this lack of encouragement and assistance, the number of students with LD enrolling in post-secondary institutions has increased dramatically in the last two decades. Realistically, many students with disabilities are not encouraged to go to college; nevertheless, the numbers are steadily increasing, and the students with learning disabilities who are choosing a post-secondary education are searching for more challenging settings (Aune, 1991; Brinckerhoff, 1993; Brinkerhoff et al., 1993; Collet-Klingenberg, 1998).

Transition education is critical for adolescents with learning disabilities. It is imperative that this nation's educational system incorporate this concept into its goals and delivery systems to ensure that all students achieve the ultimate outcome of education—preparation for a self-sufficient, productive lifestyle. (Fairweather & Shaver, Frank & Sitlington, Sitlington, Frank & Carson, Wagner & D'amico, Marder, Newman & Blackorby).

The decision by a learning disabled student to pursue a degree at a four-year college is one that should be made as early as possible in high school in order to plan for the transition process (Patton, Cronin, & Jairrels, 1997; Levinson, 1998). The transition from high school into adult life is a difficult period for all high school students, with or without disabilities. In special education, the interest is often framed as the movement from school to employment even though many learning disabled students are totally capable of transitioning and succeeding in a post-secondary establishment.

For students with learning disabilities, several different pathways can be followed, including four-year colleges, community colleges and private vocational schools. At least, in theory, all these options are available. Realistically, many students with

disabilities are not encouraged to go to college; nevertheless, the numbers are steadily changing. Because the proportion of university students with learning disabilities is growing, all educational programs should be required to conduct a self-examination to determine how to accommodate the students with learning disabilities who enter programs of study (Lauffer, 2000).

The transition assessment process must allow students, families, and professionals an opportunity to participate in assessment activities that are conducted in a variety of natural environments and that address the multiple outcomes associated with the transition process (Sitlington, 1993). Most of these students now entering college have special needs related to both academic survival and career development that are often unrecognized and unmet in colleges. For most students, college is a time of unprecedented academic and social development; however, for students with learning disabilities, it can be a nightmare. When these students enter college, they are not only beginning an unexplored and unfamiliar way of life, but also embarking on a journey that threatens their established motivational drive, need for order, compensatory skills, and social relationships (Cohn, 1998). Success can depend heavily on proper planning and counseling before hand. The students may require considerable intervention in high school, before they can make vocational decisions. They are in need of, and required by law, to be provided with services that are designed to assist them in making the transition from high school to post-secondary education (Levinson, 1998).

Secondary and post-secondary institutions need to evaluate their transition programs in a systematic manner to determine how the needs of these students can be met. This

study could be significant in the future for enhancement of transition programs for students with LD.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations inherent to most qualitative studies, which include small samples and the lack of generalizability of findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). By focusing on only one setting, perceived to be an effective and successful program, in an attempt to provide insight into this issue, this study will be perceived to be "a case of a larger phenomenon" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). As Miles & Huberman (1994) pointed out, the best use of generalization in qualitative research is analytical rather than from the sample studied to other populations. Another limitation is that all of the participants were volunteers and not randomly assigned. Also, focusing on only one setting may be perceived as a lack in this project, as no other setting will be studied as a contrast. The evaluation study was conducted at only one university; and therefore, may not be representative of the general undergraduate population with LD.

This investigator is aware of the limitations of a small sample and only one setting, but this study is being conducted to address a void in the literature on transition practices, and the lack of information existing that has been obtained through actual experiences of students involved in those practices. No attempt was made to compare students without a support program in the university setting with the subjects in this study who had a support program in college.

A *learning disability* is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span, although students have average or above average intelligence. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities, but do not themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance), or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, inappropriate or insufficient instruction) they are not the result of those influences or conditions (National Joint Committee on learning disabilities, 1990).

In the landmark document *OSERS Programming for the Transition of Youth with Disabilities: Bridges from School to Working Life*, Madeline Will (1986) of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services defined *transition* as:

> The transition from school to working life is an outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment. Transition is a period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional post secondary education or adult services and structure offered by the school and the opportunities and risks of adult life. Any bridge requires both a solid span and a secure foundation at either end. The transition

from school to work and adult life requires sound preparation in the secondary school, adequate support at the point of school leaving, and secure opportunities and services, if needed, in adult situations (Will, 1986).

Post-secondary education is the provision of formal instructional programs with a curriculum designed primarily for students who have completed the requirements for a high school diploma or equivalent. This includes programs with academic, vocational, and continuing professional education purposes, and excludes vocational and adult basic education programs (National Center for Statistics, 1997).

For the purpose of this study, the movement of students from one educational setting to another is considered to be **transition,** specifically from a secondary to a post-secondary educational setting. Students registered at a post-secondary education institution who are working in a program leading to a baccalaureate degree or other formal award below the baccalaureate, such as an associate degree are considered **undergraduate students.** (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997).

Chapter II

Literature Review

This literature review is divided into five parts. The first part provides a background for the history of rights and services for students with learning disabilities, and the second part outlines laws and reforms relevant to students with learning disabilities who are enrolled in post-secondary institutions. The third part presents an overview of transition services. The fourth covers outcomes of transition services for students with LD, and the fifth the literature on reported best practices of transition.

History of Rights and Services

In the early 1900s, public education for children with disabilities began to develop according to two principles that seemed to have universal applicability: (1) the principle of opportunity and (2) the principle of proof. The *principle of opportunity* simply meant that any child should be allowed to enroll in any class open to other children, with no prior restrictions placed on participation. The *principle of proof,* however, provided that continuance in a class, school experience, or school activities would be contingent upon meeting the standards used to determine satisfactory performance. Unlike the principle of opportunity, the principle of proof imposed a qualitative expectation on the behavior of the student. Each child had to prove his or her ability and willingness to meet the standards set for each class. The application of those two principles to govern programs for students with LD has a long history (Sitlington, Clark, & Kolstoe, 2000).

Earliest records describe programs for secondary education as having to demonstrate progress to stay in place (Descoeudres, 1928; Duncan, 1943; Ingram, 1960; Hungerford,

1943). Although qualitative standards were not set, the progressive activities made it easy to implement a hierarchy of performance activities, both abstract and concrete. The principle of proof seemed to be in operation. It seems possible that the principle of proof played a role in programs for students with disabilities, but probably was tempered in application. Such was not the case for the principle of opportunity. Education has practiced exclusivity from the beginning as documented by Jordan (1973). Special educational provisions were theoretically met and fairly unrestricted. They continued to be unrestricted as long as the standards of expected achievement continued to be met. The principle that controlled participation included both the principle of opportunity and the principle of proof (Jordan, 1973).

With the outbreak of World War I, a swing in the attitude toward students with disabilities occurred. First, the development and use of IQ tests revealed that the number of persons with scores below "normal" was larger than originally expected (Anastasi, 1976). Secondly, the sudden appearance of war veterans whose wounds left them with disabilities prompted people to acknowledge the problem of disabilities as universal. The sudden visibility of people with disabilities from combat attacked the myth of heritability of disabilities. The result was a scramble to provide services of all kinds for people with disabilities (Anastasi, 1976).

The major outcome of the increase in special education program research was confusion over what the programs were actually accomplishing for people with disabilities. Although many studies were done to try to assess the effectiveness of special education programs (efficacy studies), most were vague. One reason was that there was no agreement on what was supposed to be accomplished by the programs. Confining the

criterion of success to academic achievement provided avenues for criticisms (Johnson, 1962; Dunn, 1986; Kolstoe, 1972; MacMillan, 1977; Wagner, Damico, Marder, Newman, Blackeroy,1992). However, no amount of in-depth analysis helped the programs because they had not agreed upon goals or direction.

As the United States matured, prevailing social climates had their effects on the treatment of persons with disabilities. Often billed as "opportunity" classes or programs, the educational model prevailing after World War II was an exclusive one. Self-contained classes and even schools composed of children sharing the same or similar disabilities proliferated for those children and youth whose disabilities or family situations did not warrant placement in special schools or institutions. Equal educational opportunity required instruction to be modified to deal with the difficulties imposed by a disability (Johnson, 1962).

Another movement to identify curricula appropriate for youths with disabilities had its roots in the 1960s, but it did not become widely accepted until the 1970s. Criticisms of special education services were generally directed at elementary level programs, partly because there were not many secondary programs to be criticized. Nonetheless, some criticisms of secondary work-training programs and vocational rehabilitation programs did surface. Congress soon passed the Vocational Education Act of 1963, which specified that persons with disabilities could be included in ongoing vocational education along with peers without disabilities. Career education was considered an alternative to the narrow job preparation approach of vocational education and was also a response to the problem associated with the general education course of study in the nation's high schools. National acceptance of the concept of *career education* was facilitated by the

appointment of Kenneth Hoyt in 1972 to coordinate program efforts in the U.S. (Sitlington,Clark, & Kolstoe, 2000).

Without the aid of persons such as Melville Appell in the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped and the endorsement of the American Vocational Association and the Council for Exceptional Children, especially the Division of Career Development, career education might not have made the impact it has made on students with disabilities (Sitlington, Clark & Kolstoe, 2000). Fortunately, its acceptance was not confined to the national level. It also went into the local levels of the nation. The effect was a significant increase of opportunities in the secondary programs for LD students.

Despite these programs, little evidence exists to show that people with disabilities were considered capable of traditional schooling, competitive employment, or valued citizens of the community. Pioneering efforts for education and training through the years did, however, keep hope alive for some individuals and their families. They were able to get minimal educational programs by forcing schools to be aware of them and their needs (Sitlington, Clark, & Kolstoe, 2000).

A handful of accommodations were made and the students were at least able to continue in general education programs because they were able to prove their abilities through performance. The principle of proof worked in favor of some of the students and led to the denial of general education opportunities for others. Educational goals were broadened to include vocational education and career education. The validity of career and vocational education for persons with disabilities was well established. Now that the concept of transition services had embraced the best of life-career development and vocational approaches, there was reason to be optimistic about moving closer to meeting

the needs of those who wished to transition to post-secondary education after high school(Sitlington, Clark, & Kolstoe, 2000).

The transition programs have evolved over the years from legislation, research, and reform movements in education. Federal laws in the fields of special education, rehabilitation, vocational-technical education, and workforce training have provided legal mandates for the provision of vocational and transition services to individuals with disabilities. Educators who work with disabilities must be familiar with these laws and mandates to ensure that students have access to a range of educational options and receive appropriate transition planning services. Research, especially studies documenting post secondary outcomes for students with disabilities have also influenced the development of transition programs. Recently researchers have sought to identify practices in secondary special education, including the delivery of transition services. These findings have also served as benchmarks for practitioners and policymakers to develop guidelines for secondary programs (Sitlington, Clark & Kolstoe, 2000).

Educators and policy makers have had to respond to a number of reform movements that have had an impact on all students in secondary settings for the last two decades. Educational reform efforts in the 1980s resulted in an increased emphasis on academic achievement, which mean students have to earn more credits in English, math, science, and social studies courses. Many students have also had to pass minimum competency tests that serve as documentation of their mastery of academic content, and, sometimes, determine the type of diploma they receive. Secondary educators who provide transition services have had to combine their practices and programs with the requirements of the

educational reform movements. Students with disabilities and their parents are often asked to make difficult choices regarding curricular content and diploma options.

Educational reforms in the 1990s focused on the need for diverse outcomes through school-to-work programs for all students. At the same time, schools were held under pressure to raise academic standards for all students and were held accountable if they failed to do so. Those social, political, and educational influences have had an impact on high school curriculum. The mandates for transition programs and better post secondary outcomes have had to compete with the mandates to raise academic standards (Sitlington, Clark & Kolstoe, 2000).

Educational, vocational, and transitional services for individuals with disabilities are mandated in legislation that spans the fields of special education, vocational/technical education, rehabilitation, and training for the workforce. Current laws in these fields call for interdisciplinary efforts to serve individuals with disabilities in an educational setting. A good understanding of the law will ultimately enhance transition planning for students with disabilities during the high school years (Sitlington, Clark & Kolstoe, 2000.).

Laws and Reforms

Research reflects that many service providers in post-secondary settings who work with students with LD often view their primary role s as implementers of laws and regulations (Brinkerhoff, Shaw & McGuirre,1998; Shaw, 1998). Providers frequently must attempt to juggle the provisions of law with what they think is best for the student(s). Being proactive is appropriate when developing accommodations and services rather than being reactive in response to the latest court ruling or Office of Civil

Rights (OCR) finding (Shaw, 1998, February). **Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973** was a main piece of legislation, providing minimal rights to students with LD. It states that a "qualified" person with a disability is someone who "meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in an education program or activity." {**34 CFR 104.3 (k)**}. When students with disabilities meet these criteria, **Section 504** mandates provision of the following: (a) access to facilities and activities; (b) admission policies that do not discriminate on the basis of a disability; (c) testing procedures with appropriate accommodations; and (d) provisions of auxiliary aids and services (Lynch-Torkelson & Gussel, 1996). Any institution receiving federal funds is required to adhere to these regulations.

Signed into law in 1975, **PL 94-142** was the landmark legislation that provided all children with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The **Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA)** mandated that each child have an **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** that addressed the present levels of functioning, long and short term goals, services to be provided, and plans for initiating and evaluating services. The evaluation process for each student was to be non-discriminatory and made by a multi-disciplinary team. Parents had to be notified when their children were to be evaluated and placed in special education services.

Section 626 of the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1983, PL 98-199, was the first act that authorized $6.6 million in funding to develop and support school-to-work transition services for youths with disabilities in the form of model demonstration programs, research projects, and personnel preparation projects

(Rusch & Phelps, 1987). These projects served as starting points for others to develop transition programs and shape future policy. **The Education of Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986, PL 99-457,** authorized the funding of discretionary programs under **Section 626** and authorized funding for research projects to investigate post secondary outcomes for students with disabilities who had dropped out of school. Most importantly, PL 99-457 mandated the provision of services to infants and toddlers with disabilities. This increased the spectrum of services offered individuals with disabilities from birth to 21 (or 22) and focused on the need for interdisciplinary efforts during the early years. These laws did not actually mandate transition services for students with disabilities, but the foundation was set for the sweeping changes that took place with the **Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990, PL 101-476.**

The **Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990 (IDEA)** was the first federal legislation mandating that a statement of needed transition service, an Individual Transition Plan (ITP), be included in students' IEPs by age 16 or younger. This legislation extended to both public and private sectors. The Act clearly designated that special educators were responsible for initiating the transition planning process. The ITP was also to include (when appropriate) a statement of each public agency's responsibilities or linkages before the student exited the school system. This mandate clearly stated that transition planning was to include individuals and organizations who provided post-secondary services to individuals with disabilities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act amendment of 1997, PL 105-17 and the Final Regulations for this Act (Department of Education, 1999) broadened the scope of transition planning in a number of ways. Significantly, PL 105-17 changed

the age requirement for an ITP to14. The definition for transition services remained the same with the exception that the coordinated set of activities could include related services like transportation and support services such as speech and language pathology and audiology services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, social work services, counseling, orientation and mobility services and medical services for diagnostic and evaluation purposes.

Another significant change in the IDEA Amendments of 1997 included planning for students that focuses on courses of study. This mandate requires special educators, students, and families to be aware of curricula and diploma options, prerequisites for vocational training, and college entrance requirements as early as possible. If a student is college bound, the IEP team should determine what courses are needed in middle school and high school that will enable the student to enter a post-secondary education. **The Rehabilitative Act Amendments of 1992, PL 102-569** had stated the purpose "to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve economic self sufficiency, independence, and inclusion and integration into society." In addition, the Act mirrored the self-determination and inclusion movements in special education to actively involve individuals with disabilities in planning and implementing their educational services in integrated environments. This was significant for secondary students for a number of reasons. First, transition services were now assured. Secondly, there was a change in determining eligibility for those services. Thirdly, a smooth transition was ordered. Recent legislation has targeted the need for state and local school systems to develop high standards for all students and for schools to be held accountable if students cannot meet

the standards set. Standards identify the content all students need to know how to live and work in the twenty-first century (Sitlington, Clark & Kolstoe, 2000).

Goals 2000, PL 103-227, set national goals to improve schools. Goal 2 of Goals 2000 called for the high school graduation rate to increase to 90 percent by the year 2000, meaning a significant reduction would be needed in the number of students who drop out of school. Dropout rates for students with disabilities have been estimated to be about 32 percent (Wagner, 1991).

The college preparatory track provides a broad foundation of courses. The outcome for students in this track is obviously to continue in post-secondary education after high school. College prep programs generally impose more rigorous standards in content difficulty and level of performance expectations. Careful planning at IEP meetings is required with the student, family, teachers, and guidance counselors to decide if this option is best suited for a student. Not only are considerations desirable for good planning, but they are necessary to comply with the transition requirements in the IDEA Amendments of 1997.

Several studies about individuals with learning disabilities (Fairweather and Shaver, 1991; Frank & Sitlington, 1997; Sitlington, Frank, & Carson, 1993; Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman & Blackberry, 1992) revealed that students with disabilities do not have the same rate of enrollment in post secondary education as students who do not have learning disabilities. This study explored the backgrounds of students with learning disabilities who successfully enrolled and made a positive transition into post secondary education. This was done in order to determine whether it was or was not because of

positive steps that were taken during high school to help them make the transition, or because of other factors, or both.

Transition Services Overview

Transition is a process in which people move from one environment to another. Throughout a student's academic career, he or she will encounter many transitions; for example, students must make transitions from elementary school to high school and then from junior high school to high school. For most students without disabilities, these transitions are sometimes stressful but not extremely difficult. For students with LD, these transitions can be filled with anxiety and fear of the unknown. Transition services are defined with **IDEA (IDEA, P.L. 101-476**) as a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that:

(a)   is designed within an outcome orientated process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation.

(b)   is based upon the individual student's need, taking into account the student's preferences and interests; and,

(c)   includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (**Section 602 (a)(14)**).

A formal transition program consists of a set of activities designed to assist students in preparing for and understanding the new environments they are entering. For these transition activities to occur successfully, comprehensive transition services must be in place within the secondary educational setting.

The overarching component within the transition process is the development of an **Individualized Transition Plan (ITP)**, which includes objectives to be followed if the student is to reach his/her transition goals. The main purpose of the ITP is to prepare students to lead productive, independent lives after their secondary education experience. To achieve the goals written in the ITP, students must first be integrated into normalized environments within their secondary education. Secondly, paid work experiences are essential to provide the students the experiences necessary to secure and hold a job. Thirdly, family and friends must be supportive at this time. Finally, coordination of services should be by one individual. This insures all resources and information are being properly and consistently disseminated. Each of these components must be assessed and evaluated for educators to see the impact of the transition process (Richards, 2000).

Outcomes of Transition Services for Students with LD

Transition services have traditionally focused on students with severe cognitive, physical and sensory disabilities. Students with LD were long believed to possess the cognitive skills necessary to make transitions into adult life on their own (Bassett & Smith, 1996). The need for services for LD students has become increasingly apparent as outcomes of longitudinal studies report dismal post-school outcomes for those students (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998; Edgar, 1987; Schumaker, Deshler, Alley & Warner, 1983).

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Although students with LD have the highest employment rate of all disability categories, they still have high rates of unemployment and underemployment when compared with the general population (Edgar, 1987; Humes & Brammer, 1985; Sitlington & Frank, 1990). Fairweather and Shaver (1991) found that only 17% of students with LD who are eligible to enroll in post-secondary education actually do so. This percentage is compared to 56% of non-disabled students. Transition efforts and research to support transition programs, were only initiated for students with LD when professionals began to realize that learning disabilities stay with a person for life.

Dowdy, Carter, and Smith (1990) examined the self-perceived differences in the transition needs of secondary students with and without LD. A transitional services survey was used to examine differences in: (a) identification of career goals; (b) self-perceived social support system; (c) assistance in transition from school to work; (d) post-graduation goals; and (e)self-perceived assets and limitations in respect to goals after high school; (f) knowledge of vocational rehabilitation services. It was found that 50 LD and 28 NLD (Non Learning Disabled) students participated in programs with transition efforts.

When questioned about career goals, both groups noted that parents had the greatest effect on those decisions. Parents also helped in securing employment during high school. Each group noted that they would like more assistance in career goals and planning. Students with LD inquired about how to get a job and live independently. Both groups thought personality and behavior problems would be the biggest obstacle to getting a job. In regard to college, 63.9% of students with LD indicated that their parents would provide assistance if they attended college compared to 98.3% of NLD students.

Forty-two percent of the students with LD and 18.8% of NLD students reported that they thought academic problems would keep them from going to college (Richards, 2000).

Dowdy et al. (1990) found few differences between students with and without LD when asked questions related to the existence of support programs. The support programs for students with LD were administered by vocational rehabilitation agencies while NLD students were receiving support in their high school business classes. The focus of activities within the transition model used were: (a) understanding strengths and weaknesses; (b) awareness of post-secondary requirements; (c) exploring career options; (d) selecting a college; (e) using study strategies; (f) using accommodations; (g) developing self-advocacy skills; and (h) improving self-advocacy skills. The processes used to enhance those areas during the participants' junior years of high school were to select appropriate course work for post school objectives, learn and use study strategies, explore different career options, and become aware of post-secondary school options.

Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz (1997), in an effort to broaden the focus of transition, studied transition as it related to factors of success for students with LD in post-secondary education, conducted semi-structured interviews with counselors for students with LD in nine post-secondary institutions. In order to have a broad range of experiences represented, nine post-secondary institutions included two private colleges, two state universities, two public four-year colleges, one community college, and two vocational schools. The primary question was, "What personal characteristics contribute to the post-secondary academic success of students with LD?" (Hicks-Coolick & Kurtz, 1997). Three interrelated factors were reported – motivation, preparation, and self-advocacy.

These factors, reported Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz, differentiated successful from successful students with LD.

Counselors who participated in this study reported that students who were successful made completion of a post-secondary education their primary goal. Furthermore, the students used the support services available to them to achieve that goal. It was noted that motivation and hard work toward a goal were not always reflected in the grades earned by the students with LD. The students also needed to be prepared academically to meet the challenges in a post-secondary setting. These challenges were met when students developed self-advocacy skills. Researchers defined the characteristics of self-advocacy as: (a) self-awareness; (b) self-acceptance; (c) knowledge of laws, policies, and resources; (d) assertiveness skills; and (e) problem solving skills. All of those characteristics were included because they provided the students with the skills necessary to articulate their needs, both socially and academically.

Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz (1997) also suggested that school counselors can help students to cultivate the ability to self-advocate. The main focus was to teach students with LD how to articulate the nature of their particular LD, and how the LD affected them. In addition to this understanding of their LD, was the focus of their acceptance of the LD. The researchers suggested that a multi-system approach should be used to cultivate the characteristics associated with successful students with LD. This approach should be incorporated into individual counseling, self-advocacy groups, and collaboration efforts among educational professionals (Richards, 2000).

In answer to the need for transition services, many secondary and post-secondary institutions initiated summer programs. Dalke and Schmitt (1987) studied outcomes of

students who had attended a summer program focused on assisting students with LD in their transition to college. The researchers found that the GPAs for the semester for those students who attended the program were significantly higher than the GPAs of students who had not attended. Furthermore, to explore the students' transition needs, a 17-item questionnaire was administered at the conclusion of the program. Based on the results of the questionnaire, students showed overall satisfaction with the program. They rated the component on how to secure services as the most helpful. Students also noted that they understood their individual LD better because of the training received during the summer. The students were able to make friends for the fall. At the beginning of the semester, the students were able to contact their professors sooner than they had in the past (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987).

Another outcome observed was the description of the differences between high school and college as experienced by the students. Due to the different demands on students in post-secondary settings, Dalke and Schmitt (1987) saw the need for a focused transition program. They outlined four important differences between high school and college that cause difficulty for students with LD. They were a drastic decrease in teacher-student contact, greater academic competition, a different personal support system, and loss of a protective environment. All of these differences need to be brought to the attention of students with LD either during counseling in high school or in a workshop format before they enter college, or they could feel like they are behind other students and not understand why (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987).

Transition services relate to many programs options focused on providing students with support, information, and resources about post high school environments. The

literature supports the premise that the information students with LD receive during high school can assist them in making appropriate decisions about post-school goals (Richards, 2000).

Review of Best Practices in Transition

There are ample resources detailing the history of transition, what transition should entail, models of transition curricula, and reported best practices in transition. Even, so, there exists a paucity of research detailing the actual implementation of transition programs in secondary special education settings (Collet-Klingenburg, 1996). One area of literature has to do with indicators of successful secondary special education transition programs. During the decade since OSERS' (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services) identification of transition as a priority, over 266 model programs have emerged to meet this challenge (Rusch, Chadsey-Rusch, & Szymanski, 1982). As a result of these model programs and the research surrounding them, a number of factors have risen to the surface as contributing to best practices.

Among the myriad of best practices reported are a number of common factors. Foss (1999) identifies the most frequently cited factors as interagency cooperation and collaboration, vocational assessment, vocational skills training, social skills training, career education curricula, paid work experience, written transition plans and family involvement. Educators and service providers in Minnesota identified factors they viewed as critical to effective planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to adult life. (Collet-Klingenburg, 1996). The following are factors or standards they generated: (a) student and family involvement, (b) an emphasis on total life experiences, (c) agency involvement, (d) training in self-awareness and self-advocacy,

(e) comprehensive transition plans to be used by students following secondary education, (f) collaboration of team members, (g) beginning transition planning no later than 14, (h) transition plans based on student needs and desired adult outcomes, (i) functional instruction which includes student experiences, and (j) an emphasis on instruction in functional life skills taught in natural environments.

In a review of 49 documents (consisting of theory-based discussion of literature, experimental or quasi-experimental and follow-up literature), Kohler (1993) found the following. Over half of documents reviewed identified vocational training, parent involvement, and interagency collaboration and service delivery as important. Social Skills training, paid work experience, and individualized transition plans were identified as best practices in over a third of the documents. Finally, Kohler reported that employability skills training and inclusion in integrated settings were shown to be effective in two studies, although these factors were not implied as effective in the majority of the documents reviewed. Therefore, the literature that details best practices in transition focuses on issues related to planning, implementation, and follow-up. The factors gleaned from this literature reviewed are best practices in general. Programs will vary depending on their locale and the community within which they exist. The discussion hereon deals with transition practices for students with learning disabilities.

Summary

Transition practices, by their nature, reflect the community within which the student will live, the needs and goals of the student in the process of transitioning, and the resources available within the school at hand. By considering those practices to be state-of-the-art (i.e., best practice) by experts in the field, a basis is provided upon which to

begin examining practices at the level being investigated. Consideration of the outcomes

and related activities from other programs and research sheds even greater light on the

efficacy of local practice and provides a starting point from which others can make

generalizations (either analytical or case-to-case) regarding transition practice (Collet-

Klingenburg, 1998).

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the transition practices

experienced by six students who had successfully made the transition from high school to

a post-secondary education setting. The following were research questions in this study:

(1)   Does the existence of transition services affect the post-secondary education of

students with learning disabilities?

(2)   How do self-determination, the ability to communicate, and interpersonal

relations contribute to the success or failure of LD students in post-secondary

programs?

Topics covered in this chapter include: research design, (b) sampling, (c) setting, (d)

participants, (d) data collection, and (e) limitations of the study.

Research Design

The design for this research utilized qualitative methodology. Specifically, this is a

phenomenological study that seeks "deep understanding"of the transition experiences of

the participants as they were related to this researcher (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Qualitative methods were used to approach the issue of transition practice from a holistic

perspective. Although focus was directed at literature on transition practices, it should be

noted that sometimes best practices are focused on, but not actually utilized in secondary

programs. Only by closely examining the life experiences of the individuals involved in

the study, by reviewing their answers to questions, by observing their progress, and by

reconstructing their learning and living experiences can this researcher begin to

understand what really occurred for them in their instructional settings.

There are concerns with the use of interview research specifically the correspondence between reported answers (e.g. what individuals say they do) and true values (e.g. what really occurs) (Fowler, 1993). Students were assured that there were no right or wrong answers, no best answers to questions being asked, and that this investigator was not seeking any hypothesized outcome. After students were interviewed, individuals at their prospective high schools were contacted regarding the actual practices existing in those transition programs.

Sampling

While sampling was purposive, rather than random in nature (Miles & Huberman, 1994), this is considered acceptable, perhaps even desirable, in light of the nature of this study, which was to examine, in detail, the experiences of transition as related by students with learning disabilities who had successfully transitioned from secondary education to a university with a support program. According to Patton (1990), in-depth information gathered through qualitative research from a very small sample size can be valuable. Marshall (1985) concurs, stating that the use of qualitative methods is well suited for types of research that explore complex processes.

The criteria for choosing the participants for this study included: (1) a grade point average of 3.2 or above for at least three semesters; (2) history of a formal program in high school presented in an attempt to assist the transition of the student to a post-secondary institution; (3) participation in a well rounded extra curricular program; (4) participation at the post-secondary institution in a formal program of support. Volunteers responded to announcements in classes about the study.

Setting

The setting chosen for this program was in a four-year university that provides a support program for students with learning disabilities. Interviews were conducted in a private conference room in one of the academic buildings on campus. The private university serves over 2500 students, and the support program for students with learning disabilities is only one of the many programs it provides for its students. The support program for students with LD, however, is one of the best in the United States. Students have professors who specialize in teaching students with learning disabilities, a special tutoring center where all tutors have at least a masters level education (some have doctorates), along with many other advantages. All advantages are provided for success for the students who attend, but some students are still not able to make the transition.

Participants

As the focus of this study was the practice of transition services for students with LD, only those students who had made a successful transition to college were chosen. The classroom was the primary resource for the students who volunteered to be in the study. The students interviewed had been enrolled for at least three semesters, and each had a 3.2 grade point average or better, out of a possible 4.0. Each of the students who participated was also observed to be socially comfortable in his or her surroundings at school, and many displayed exceptional leadership qualities through organizations and other activities in which they participated at the university.

This investigator attempted to remain a full observer, interacting only with students on an as needed basis to continue the interview. After questions were asked, this researcher

did not attempt to influence the answers of the participants in any way. Complete notes were taken on everything observed and heard. Particular attention was paid to answers regarding transition objectives. Time spent in participant interviews and translation of the material in those interviews was about 40 hours. Participants' names were changed.

Data Collection Procedures

Two means of collecting data were used in this study over a period of three months. In twelve meetings, two with each student, information was gathered for analysis. During the first interview, each participant was asked to first fill out the sections on *Self-Determination, Communication, and Interpersonal Relationships* in the **Transitory Planning Inventory Student Form,** a test compiled by Gary M. Clark and James R. Patton (1997) which assesses transition needs. Fifteen questions were answered within a range of 0 to 5, ranging from *Not Appropriate* to *Strongly Agree* (See Appendix 1). Then, the investigator asked a series of 20 questions (See Appendix 2.) and discussed the answers in depth with each participant. In the second interview which lasted about 20 minutes, the researcher recapitulated answers to be sure that the interpretations were correct. A total of 12 sessions were held with the students, two with each student. The following is a description of the procedures used for analyzing the outcome data. All aspects of student transition experiences were considered.

The results of this study could be significant in identifying valuable transition practices in secondary schools that may assist students with learning disabilities to be successful in college. It may also help to clarify what other characteristics within the students themselves may assist them in making successful transitions to college. This

study, and future studies of this nature, could greatly enhance the prospects of all students with LD for attending college after high school.

Analysis of Data

As stated previously, data were collected via two methods. These data were used in concert to generate a more thorough understanding of the transition practices that were in use with each of the participants, as well as the other factors that came into play. Specifically, the researcher wanted to determine which transition practices were being used and whether or not those transition practices were the only factors that were key for the success of the students.

While collecting data, an attempt was made to integrate findings across the methods for initial data analysis. Delamont (1992) argues that data analysis must be conducted from the time the researcher enters the setting until the final report is completed. Data from field notes taken through interviews and observations were used to determine what the transition experiences actually were for all of the students. In addition, data taken from field notes generated questions used in later interviews.

Initial analysis involved identifying recurrent themes and making a list of them. A running list was made of possible themes to look for in subsequent data collection in interviews with participants (Delamont, 1992). Data from each source was compared to data of other sources.

All data (i.e. field notes, interview notes, interview transcriptions, and document review notes) were typed and divided in sub-categories. The investigator was assisted by two individuals in identifying and developing themes. In order to make sense (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of these data, two charts were employed. The first chart focused transition

practices that were present in the secondary schools of participants, and the second chart focused on self-determination, communication skills, and interpersonal relations of the participants. Added themes were allowed to emerge as the study progressed. Data from multiple sources and methods was continually compared and contrasted in an attempt to identify patterns as well as exceptions to patterns. As this procedure was employed from the start of the study, a continual narrowing process resulted; that is, data started more general, and as themes emerged, became increasingly specific.

The triangulation method of gathering information (Maxwell, 1996) from a diverse range of individuals using a variety of methods (Denzin, 1970; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) reduced the risk that conclusions might reflect the systematic biases or limitations of a specific method and allowed the researcher to gain a better assessment of the validity and generality of the explanations that developed. Triangulation is not limited to confirmation (or lack of), but emphasizes the potential for unlimited perspectives of the same event. The use of constant comparison used in conjunction with a focus on the unfolding of data, served to derive themes from highly, discrepant, and often very specific details in the interviews (Maxwell, 1996).

Data from all sources were examined and re-examined throughout the study. The best practices of transition as determined in the literature above were compared with the actual practices of the high schools where the students experienced or did not experience transition programs. Characteristics of personality, including self-determination, communications skills, and interpersonal relationship skills were compared and analyzed within and across the subject data in Chapter IV.

Limitations of the Study

Any study, whether qualitative or quantitative in nature, has limitations. The limitations inherent to most qualitative work include small sampling size and the lack of generalizability of findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Supposed best practices in transition are well documented in the literature. By providing thorough detail and description the reader is given enough information to determine for him or herself whether or not the findings are applicable to other specific settings. Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that the best use of generalization in qualitative research is analytical rather than from the sample studied to other populations.

Another potential limitation, related to the use of only one setting, is the lack of comparison. While no other setting was used to study the data as a contrast, the use of the extant literature on best practices in transition served as a means of comparison (Collet-Klingenberg, 1996). Furthermore, by limiting this study to one setting, there was no risk of having two settings/samples that might differ on some uncontrolled variable and have serious effects on the outcome of this study. Participants attended a university with a support program for LD students. No comparisons were made between participants' achievements and those of students without a support program.

Chapter IV

Findings

Chapter IV presents the results of a study that evaluated the experiences of six LD

students' transitions from secondary schools to a four-year university. Specifically, the

transition programs that assisted them to make the crossover and other elements that

aided them with their successes in post-secondary education were addressed. The results

are incorporated as the research questions were posited, and each case study includes:

(a) Descriptions of the participants' transition programs as verbalized by the students

themselves, (b) Discussion of characteristics of students that helped them to be

successful.

Factors identified in the Literature Review, Chapter II, as best practices included: (1))

comprehensive planning, as part of the Individual Education Planning (IEP) process, (2)

individualized skills training, (3) vocational planning, (4) development of social skills (5)

academic support, and (6) involvement of parents in planning, (7) involvement and

collaboration of school and community, possibly in a work situation.

The characteristics identified by the Transition Planning Inventory (TPI) student form

(Clark & Patton, 1997) included (a) self-determination, (b) communication, and (c)

interpersonal skills. Each area was explored through levels ranging from 0 to 5, with 5

being the strongest degree of confidence (See Appendix II).

Introduction to Case Studies

These case studies are about transitions made by students with learning disabilities

from their high schools to a post-secondary educational institution with a formal program

of support for students with learning disabilities. The cases describe sets of implemented

practices, cohesive processes, and experiences of six college students who have been successful at the university socially and academically, with grade point averages of 3.2 or above, maintained for a period of at least three semesters. These stories are not about transition as an outcome. As readers of this study will find through the participants' descriptions, transition is not an end product, just as the stories of the participants reflected in these narratives do not end. These stories do not have an ending, only a beginning and a middle. The themes have evolved from the findings regarding the participants' personal experiences and outcomes.

Case Study Number One:

Joshua

Joshua, sometimes known as Josh, attended a high school in Ohio that was known to be a college prep school, even though it was public. A large percentage of the students who came out of this particular secondary school attended college and were academically successful. The college preparatory curriculum at this high school was based on the same teaching methods that are employed at most universities. An instructor came to the high school to give special preparation to students who were taking college entrance exams. "The teachers were extremely knowledgeable, and in some ways, even more demanding in their expectations than some of my college professors," said Joshua. "We also had a tutoring program that was excellent. The tutors were capable and competent."

The guidance team for helping students prepare for transition to college included counselors and special college advisors. Parent involvement was encouraged, and parents were included in meetings. This story could be the success story of any student in college, except for one thing. The team encouraged Joshua not to go to a four-year-

college. They advised him to go to a two-year community school. Joshua had learning disabilities in reading and writing, and although he was a good student, he had to fight for his rights throughout all his years of high school. His obvious intelligence worked for him in many ways and against him in many ways. He was often not accepted as a learning disabled student and was treated as a regular student.

Joshua said that he learned to advocate for himself in high school by watching his parents do it for so many years in elementary school. Ironically, since he was smart, his rights were never readily available, but were held to the forefront when the time came to make the decision about going to college. Joshua made the decision to go to college himself, and his parents supported him. "Since the eighth grade, I always knew I would go to college," said Joshua," and that I would someday have my own hotel in Vegas or Hawaii." One other person also supported him in going to college – his high school guidance counselor. Joshua was confident and even more determined to go to college when he was told that he should not. When he did get to college, he knew how to advocate for himself because he had done it for so many years in high school. "My parents always told me to stand up for myself, and if something needed to be corrected in my behalf, I should go to the top to get it done, if necessary. I have no problem doing this, but I have learned to choose my battles wisely."

As a senior in high school, Josh was chosen to serve on the Governor's Council of Youths with Learning disabilities. He attended a conference in Columbus, Ohio to confer with other students with learning disabilities about advocating for ADA rights. He was asked, as a representative of the Ohio Governors' Council, to speak to other groups in the future. As a confident speaker, he has been involved with the Drama Society at the

University and often appears in drama productions. He credits his high school speech teacher for helping him learn to speak well in front of large audiences.

Joshua says that he makes his own decisions, and his parents support him, although he does consult them for advice sometimes. He is socially confident and a very funny guy. He has many friends. He operates the audio/visual equipment for the university for various presentations in the auditorium. His first priority, however, is school, making good grades and graduating, so that he can have his own business. He does readily admit that he could not have the 3.6 GPA that he has without the help and support of the tutors in the tutoring program at the University. His success is based on working far ahead of deadlines, since he has difficulty with reading comprehension and writing composition. Both of these things take him an extended time to do well.

Although Joshua was not advised by the transition team at the high school to go to a four-year college, he feels that his high school was responsible for much of his success because of the teaching strategies used by the teachers. This gave him strong academic support, along with the help of his tutors. Also, he had most of the other elements of best practices for transition planning in place. He had a comprehensive IEP developed by the fifth grade that was regularly upgraded through the twelfth grade. He had special training in speech, which is one of his strongest skills. He was encouraged early by his counselor to move toward working in a people-oriented field. His social skills were highly developed due to interaction with others in drama productions and other extra-curricular activities. His parents were involved in all areas of his education planning. He did not have a job in the community, since emphasis was placed on excelling academically, but the cooperation of the school and community to make him a representative to the

Governor's council as an LD student from his high school increased his confidence and sense of responsibility. All of the characteristics for a successful transition to college were afforded Josh by the transition planning team at his high school except for one—the encouragement to go on to a post-secondary four-year college.

Joshua showed a high score in the area of self-determination on the Cook & Patton transition inventory. He gave himself the highest score of 5 in knowing and accepting his strengths and limitations, expressing his feelings and ideas in the right way and with confidence to others, setting personal goals, and making personal decisions.
He also had a 5 in the categories of speaking and listening. He scored himself with 3 on reading skills and writing skills. In interpersonal relations, Joshua felt that he gets along well with family and friends and was confident that he could be a good parent himself. He felt that he could make friends wherever he goes and get along well at school and in a work situation with co-workers and supervisors. Basically, only the areas affected by his learning disabilities were the ones that Joshua chose that could sometimes hold him back.

Upon contacting the guidance counselor who works with learning disabled students at Joshua's high school, she stated that Ohio requires that a career portfolio be started for each student as a freshman, and classes are held each week for them to work on that. They also have to construct an activity resume. Fifty hours of community service are required before a senior can graduate. She said that the high school is indeed known as a college preparatory school, and almost all of their graduates go to four-year colleges after graduation, including students with learning disabilities.

"Parents of LD students are very involved in the planning for college, and they are extremely savvy about their children's rights," she said. She went on to explain that the

town is small, and everyone knows everyone else; therefore, by nature, most students are socially inclined. The counselors for the students with LD meet regularly with the college counselors, so everyone gives credence to what is needed for each student. There is much individual attention and support, and some of the best students in the school have IEPs that reflect learning disabilities.

Case Study Number Two:

Arlan

Arlan graduated from a public high school in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. She is a psychology major and has consistently maintained a 3.9 grade point average in college, although she said she is constantly anxious about losing it. Last semester, she had a 4.0. "I was told by everyone that I should not go to college," said Arlan. When she took the S.A.T. exam for college entrance evaluation, she was not allowed to take it in two sittings, as she had the right to do as a student with learning disabilities. She did not do as well as she expected. After her mother advocated for her, she retook the exam again in two sittings and scored higher. "We always had to advocate heavily for my rights," said Arlan. " I am perfectly comfortable doing that, but it is a constant struggle, and I get tired of it."

Arlan's mother hired a private college consultant to help find the post-secondary institution that Arlan wanted to attend because the high school transition team did not recommend that Arlan attend college. The consultant also helped her gain entrance. The high school that Arlan attended won an award for national excellence, but Arlan said, "They certainly did not cater to students with learning disabilities." Her description of

the college transition team at her high school consisted of "two counselors who were available to advise students about college" — the same two who advised her not to go. "Every time I had a meeting with them, I left mad. I knew I could succeed in college with the right support. I also knew that someday I would be a therapist working with children who have mental problems. I work with children like that now during the summers. I am determined to graduate from college, get my masters and doctorate, and fulfill my dream of being a child psychologist; no one will stop me."

Arlan had an IEP in place by the fifth grade, and through testing, learned that she had visual perception and spatial perception disabilities. Also, she has difficulty thinking sequentially and symptoms of ADHD (Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder). Arlan utilizes the tutoring center and studies often, but in many ways, she said that high school was harder for her than college because she had to advocate so strongly for her rights. "College is so much easier than I expected," she said. "I can advocate for myself. I can easily talk to doctors, lawyers, and psychologists when I need to, but I knew after the first semester at this college that I would succeed without heavy arbitration. She said that she has friends, but she does not have time to socialize because of her heavy course load. Being socially accepted is not something she worries about, but she said that she often does feel shy when meeting new people. It does not hold top priority as an issue for her, although "she wants to be liked as much as anyone else does." Presently, she is an officer in the Psychology Club.

Arlan sees herself as a verbally strong person, understanding and empathetic for others, persevering, self-motivated and determined. She also sees herself as high-strung, and sometimes overly sensitive. "I'm interested in being educated and having the prestige

of a doctor. I want to be a successful person," said Arlan. "However, I have a strong conscience, and I am honest. I would never abuse any position of authority that I might have. I care about helping people. I know I can be pushy, and when something needs to be done, I want it done now. I can still be intimidated, though, in certain situations."

Even though Arlan was not encouraged by her transition team in high school to go on to college, she still had all of the qualities of a good plan in place. She had a comprehensive IEP in place early in school, and she received individualized skills training through her teachers and tutors. Her vocational plans were made early, and she worked summers at a center for disturbed children during the summers; this also reflected support by the community. Her social skills were fully developed, and she had many friends in high school. The academic support at her secondary school was very strong, since her public school was touted as a college preparatory high school. Arlan's parents were included and involved in every aspect of her plans for college.

In the Transition Planning Inventory report, Arlan strongly agreed that she knows her strengths and weaknesses. She did not feel so confident in expressing her feelings and ideas to others in the right way, and she gave herself a 4 in that category, as well as in making personal decisions. She felt strongly that she could set personal goals. In communicating, she felt that she had the speaking and listening skills she needs, while she scored herself average in reading and writing skills. She said that she gets along well with family and friends and can usually make friends wherever she goes. Arlan strongly agreed that she normally says and does the right thing wherever she is and can definitely get along well with professors and bosses in a work situation.

The counselor for students with special needs at Arlan's high school said that transitional fact sheets are filled for LD students when they are freshmen, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. This continues into the sophomore year, and as juniors, they begin to attend monthly workshops to prepare them for testing for entrance into college. They are also taught how to self advocate. Field trips to a private college and a public college give students some idea of what each type of college has to offer. Parents are involved with meetings beginning in the junior year. As seniors, they are assisted with filling out applications and techniques for interviewing. All work at the school is considered to be college level work.

Case Study Number Three:

Amy

Amy attended a high school in Massachusetts and had a regularly updated IEP from grades 9 – 12. Upon graduation, she decided to attend another year of school for college prep at a private boarding school in Lake Wales, Florida; she did not think that she was ready yet to make the transition to college. She attributes much of her success in college to taking this extra year. "After living in a boarding school, the transition to being away from home was not hard for me," said Amy. When she made the decision to go to a four-year college, her parents were concerned that she could not do the work required. "I decided to prove them wrong," she said, "I knew I could do it. My Dad said that he would support me in whatever I decided to do, so I knew I was on my way." She has consistently maintained a 3.5, or above, grade point average.

In the Massachusetts high school, she discussed many different colleges with the transition team there, but her counselor was the most knowledgeable person that she dealt with, "because she knew my strengths and weaknesses the best," she added. It was at the high school in Eagle Hills, Massachusetts, that she made her decision to go to college after another year of prep in the Florida academy.

Her parents were always involved in the planning meetings for college, although she describes herself as being very independent and making the decision to go on her own. She was also the one who decided to take the extra year of preparatory work before going to a four-year institution. "The advice I seek from my parents is mostly social advice," said Amy. "No one else knows my academic capabilities like I, myself, do. I could have used a little more encouragement from everyone. My teachers did not challenge me. I was labeled a student with learning disabilities, and my rights were always there, but may times the expectations were not high enough for me, even though I always did extra work to prove I could do well."

Amy said that she has never really been overwhelmed by the schoolwork in college, even in her freshman year, although she was socially stressed and almost left. "I finally got it together," she said," and now, I have a lot of friends. Her priority is to finish undergraduate school and attend graduate school. She wants to work with elderly people, possibly using animal therapy. She plans to work in a retirement home in the summers.

Amy describes herself as a quiet person with some difficulty opening up to people, but she feels she is gradually becoming more comfortable. "I think my tutors have helped me not only with my school work, but also with learning to trust people. "My feelings get

hurt easily, and I can't always tell when people are really joking with me," said Amy. "I think that is one reason I have always leaned toward animals as companions. They always accept you. They have helped me to open up, and I have seen how older people respond to them as well."

Amy had many of the components of a good transition program in high school, although she does not feel that the academic program was strong enough for her. "The program was a good one," she said," but they did not challenge me personally because of my learning disability. Socially, she said that the opportunities were there, but she herself was not comfortable with them for personal reasons. She had a regularly updated IEP, and was encouraged to cultivate her individual skills. Vocational planning was encouraged with the school/community collaboration for work in the retirement centers the summers. Even though she made her own decision to go to college, her parents were always supportive and involved in all areas of the planning process at school and at home.

Amy scored herself average in the areas of expressing her feelings and ideas to others in the right way with confidence, speaking, reading and writing skills. She is not too sure yet about being a parent herself and does not think she always knows for sure how to handle every situation she is put in. She is confident however in knowing her strengths and weaknesses, setting personal goals and making personal decisions. Socially, she has become much more confident since being in college, and scored a 4 in the areas of listening, making friends easily and getting along well with family and friends. "I have no problems communicating and getting along with my professors and people I work for, "

she said. " I think that is because I take the time to listen and make the right decisions, even if it takes me a little longer than some people. I'm careful."

She sees herself as assertive and well able to advocate for herself. "It just takes me a little longer to assimilate information," said Amy. "This is my diagnosed learning disability, but I have learned to work around it."

The high school that Amy attended in Massachusetts had only 100 students in attendance and 20 counselors, according to the counselor spoken with in an interview. "This encourages all students to be quite social," he said. Although the high school is not considered to be a school for students with learning disabilities, almost all of the students have some kind of special need and are in attendance at this school because of that, the counselor reported. He felt that the high degree of individualized attention that each students gets at the school contributes to their success in college, if they choose to attend. "The community itself is small," he said, "and the students come from the community, so there is a lot of involvement of parents and others in the community."

Case Study Number Four:

Kara

Kara attended high school in Ohio, and there was never a doubt that she would go to college by her, her parents or the people involved in her college preparatory transition team   at her high school. She took her A.C.T. college entrance exam twice. The first time she did not do well, but the second time, she took the test orally from a tape, and she did extremely well. She is an auditory learner and has a learning disability that impairs

her visual learning skills. "I have always known that I wanted to be a kindergarten -
second-grade elementary school teacher, and that is what I will someday do," said Kara.

She attended a public school, but there was a tutoring program available which she
used often. She feels that this program helped her to prepare academically for college.
She stated that the guidance toward a four-year university was especially strong in her
junior year. My guidance counselor particularly started prepping me for college
attendance, although I received an IEP as a freshman in high school that included college
attendance." Kara said that she never had to advocate for her rights, until she got to
college. They were always there in high school, although she was never discriminated
against as an LD student. After high school, however, Kara attended a summer program
that definitely helped her with the transition process. "Although the transition was
somewhat difficult academically, the social part of it and being away from home was not
hard because of the summer I spent at the college prep program in upstate New York,"
she said. Now, she no longer finds the academic transition difficult and has maintained a
3.3 grade point average for the last three semesters. "College is harder than I expected,
but I know I will do this," she said. "I have a strong sense of discipline, and I will never
give up." Kara was on the swim team in high school and competed regularly. "When
something is difficult, it makes me more determined," said Kara. "Being on the swim
team in high school and consistently working to win medals taught me that you can do
anything you want, if you stay at it."

Kara says that her social skills were developed early, at home and at school, and she
had no problem making friends at college. She is president of Hillel, the Jewish Society
on campus and is also a member of a sorority. She presents herself very confidently.

Kara considers herself to be quite independent. "I would tell others to take advantage of the high school programs, but also go off on your own and explore your options." Kara says that, although everyone expected her to go to college, she really made the decision on her own. " I knew I would go to college since I was a sophomore in high school. Even when people questioned me because I had a learning disability, I knew that I could and I would succeed in college. I made up my mind that I would do it, and I will. In particular, my guidance counselor stuck behind me, so I did not listen to anyone else who questioned me. I am very headstrong."

Kara feels that self-determination and perseverance are very important. "My parents always told me that you can always find a way to do anything you want to do" Kara enjoys reading to people, although she does not like reading to herself, unless it is aloud. She describes herself as a very happy person and generally an overachiever. She said that she does not makes decisions quickly, but steps back, takes a look, and then decides what she wants to do.

Her first priority is school and graduating; next, comes her family and friends. Socially, Kara is more comfortable with people she knows than with strangers in conversation. "I know I have good social skills, and I am a happy person in general, but sometimes I don't know how to take people. I can't always tell when they are joking around with me."

Kara said that she is totally focused in class, and others look to her after class for information. "College gets harder, not easier, and it takes more effort as you go along," she said. Kara was chosen for *Who's Who in American Colleges.* From a group of 30,

she was one of 3 chosen at her university. She attributes much of her success to the skills she acquired from competitive swimming.

Kara's transition team in high school established an IEP that included attending college. She received individual skills training through competing on the high school swim team and was encouraged to pursue a career in education. Her social skills were highly developed, and she received strong academic support through the high school tutoring center. Although, she was not involved in the community through a work situation, she was involved in area swim meets. Her parents were always included in planning sessions for college. All of the best practices for transitioning to college were present in her high school.

She gave herself the highest score possible in all areas of self-determination. She knew her strengths and weaknesses and how to express her feelings and ideas to others. She was strong on setting personal goals and achieving them and making her own decisions. In communicating, she felt that she had good speaking and listening skills and average abilities for reading and writing. She considered herself to be one that gets along well with family and friends, and felt that she could be a good parent. She easily makes friends wherever she goes and gets along well with professors and others in authority.

The guidance counselor at her high school said that all students have individual conferences weekly, and emphasis on college is heavy in the junior year. They have career portfolios. In the ninth and tenth grades, the students have inventories made that identify skills and interests. Learning fairs are held at various colleges in the area for high school seniors to visit. Vocational assessments are given, and most of the students go on to four-year colleges, including the students with learning disabilities. "Their

social skills are usually advanced before they even get to high school, said the counselor, "although we have intervention counselors for students who might have social problems."

Case Study Number Five:

Lisa

Lisa attended high school in Illinois. She said it was a difficult school that specialized in regular mainstream college-preparatory classes and in special education classes. In study hall, she had a comprehensive skills teacher who acted as a tutor. There were post high school counseling classes that she was required to attend, and she feels they helped her during her junior year. She was encouraged to go to college after high school. Lisa did the research on different colleges on her own, and her parents told her they would support in going to college anywhere she wanted to go. She made the decision as to where she would go on her own, although it was always a given that she would actually go to a four-year college after graduating from high school. She spent the summer before going to college at a preparatory school in New York, and stated that this assisted her with the transition.

There was a three-four member transition team at Lisa's high school that spent time with everyone talking about college. Parents were always invited to those meetings, and Lisa's parents attended regularly. "College was still hard even though I had a lot of preparation," said Lisa. "Academically, it is still hard, but not as hard as I expected because my high school was hard academically." The only thing that she found hard for her socially was that she was not used to being on her own. She has maintained a 3.4 grade point average and feels very comfortable advocating for herself when necessary.

Lisa received her IEP in elementary school, and was always told that as long as she did her best, that would be good enough. Both of her parents have their Ph.D's. She participated in some social extra-curricular activities in high school, but has done more in college. "You have to cultivate your own circle of friends in college," said Lisa," or you will get left out." Lisa said that she is a good listener and records in her mind everything that she hears in class. She enjoys helping others, and said that she will "do whatever she has to do and do it on time, in order to succeed in college." Her first priority is doing well academically and graduating on time. She has a learning disability that involves delayed processing, and she tries to compensate for that by being physically punctual and present at every class. She depends on the tutoring center for guidance, but says that she always comes prepared with an assignment in progress.

Lisa received an honors award in high school for her accomplishments in English, and she belonged to many clubs. The thing she finds hardest in school is asking questions that she is afraid have already been answered. She does not like standardized tests, and said that she has to review things thoroughly. Lisa wants to go into human services, and she said, "I am a caregiver, someone you can come to and confide in. I will always help, if I can." Lisa's short-term memory is not good, although her long-term memory is excellent. If Lisa said that if she could change anything about her high school transition program, she would have the college come in and give the course in freshman seminar that they gave her when she came to the university.

Most of the elements of best practices for successful transition to college for LD students were afforded Lisa. She had an IEP early. She received special help with her advanced skills in English. Vocational planning put her in a caretaker's role, and many

opportunities were explained to her. Her social skills were highly developed. She had strong academic support, and her parents were very involved in her decisions to go to college. Lisa never worked in the community.

Lisa rated herself average in self-determination and communication skills. She felt that her reading skill deserved the lowest of her scores (2) that she gave herself in the Transition Planning Inventory test. She gave herself the highest scores possible in getting along well with family and friends, her professors and anyone on the job that she worked with, including supervisors. Writing skills were rated average (3) by Lisa for herself. "I know what I can and cannot do," said Lisa. "I also know how to work around those things to keep them from hindering me in college."

The college counselor at Lisa's high school said that LD students at the school have case managers, as well as regular counselors. Self-reflection seminars are conducted to help students identify strengths and weaknesses, and a self-disclosure statement is written by each student. Interests are highlighted, and courses are given to teach students how to understand the laws regarding their rights, how to apply for entrance into college, and how to read a college catalog. Study skills, note taking, and even methods for dealing with professors are emphasized. A college fair is held in the senior year that hosts 200 college representatives from various universities, and students who have already graduated and gone to college, also, come in and speak. Students are encouraged to build a list of schools they are interested in, and parents are brought in to discuss the list. "Everyone is pretty much expected to go to college," she said," and 95% of our students do."

Case Study Number Six:

Stacey

Stacey attended high school in New Jersey, where she said there were several teachers who specifically tried to help her with her skills deficits due to learning disabilities. Although she had an I. E. P. as a freshman, she had no encouragement to go to college. In fact, she was urged to go to a trade school and find a job after high school. "I always knew that I would go to college," said Stacey. " I want to be a teacher's assistant. It has taken me five years to graduate, but I am graduating this May." Stacey has a learning disability that keeps her from being able to read well, even at a slow pace.

Her parents were supportive of her decision to go to college, but she was the one who really made the final decision. Before coming to a university, she attended a summer program that helped her with the transition. She has 3.2 grade point average. After working in high school at a local department store, Stacey became more self confident, and her high school guidance teacher encouraged her to go on with her education after graduation from secondary school. Many people kept telling me that I could not succeed in college," said Stacey, "but the more they said that, the more determined I was to go and do well. When I make up my mind to do something, I stick to it. I knew I could finish, if I took my time, and now, after five years, I am graduating."

Stacey does very well in her psychology classes and education courses, and after becoming a teacher's assistant, she wants to be a full-time teacher some day. She says that she has to work really hard in English and math, but she does okay in those courses. Even though her high school did have most of the best practices in place on her college-planning team, they strongly proposed that she should not go to college. She said that the

program she attended the summer after she graduated from high school was the best thing she could have done, and she credits that program for most of her academic success in college.

"I was placed in the special education classes in high school, and the students were very undisciplined. Everyone with any kind of problem, including emotional problems, was thrown together. There were big problems. Students even threw chairs at each other. Learning was impossible," said Stacey. "I did not know how to advocate for myself or ask for what I needed. My parents told me to be strong and determined. They taught me to know what was right from wrong and how to demand my rights. They always said, 'We trust you to do this for yourself,' and I began to do it because I knew they were depending on me. Now, it is easy for me to do that when necessary."

Stacey sees herself as a strong helper for other people, a good listener and someone with above average self-determination. She also feels that she expresses herself well and is assertive. She is comfortable with people joking around and does not take it personally. "Sometimes, I am shy to ask questions in class because I am afraid the question will be a dumb one, but I remember a business professor told me once that there are no dumb questions because other people usually want to know the same things you do." Stacey likes to write, and says she has a good short- term and long- term memory.

She stated that she is a good person, responsible always there for her friends. She feels she is a very grounded person, a homebody. "I always think things through and do the best I can with whatever the decision is for me or for someone else." Stacey thinks that if she had been mainstreamed with the other regular students more in high school, that she would have been more prepared for college.

All of the elements of a good transition program existed in Stacey's high school. She had an IEP and was encouraged to cultivate her writing skills. She worked in a department store through a program set up by the school and the community and was actually encouraged to work after graduation instead of going to college. Her social skills are highly developed, and she is confident with them. Academic support existed in her school for most students, although as an LD student, she did not get the full support she needed. Her parents were always involved in her planning for the future and still are.

In the *Transition Planning Inventory*, she ranked herself the very highest that she could in all areas with 5s. She said that she knows her strengths and weaknesses and knows how to express herself well and confidently with others. "I always achieve my goals," she said, "although it may take me longer than most people." She feels confident in all communication areas, except reading and prefers to have someone else read to her.

Stacey feels she gets along well with family, friends, and most others, and she easily makes friends wherever she goes. She is comfortable talking with her professors and employers and has a part-time job at the university. The only thing she is uncertain about is whether she could be a good parent. "How can I know that now?" she said. Stacey came up against all odds to become a successful college graduate.

The transition coordinator at Stacey's school said that the programs at the high school now were not in place when Stacey was at the school. Although there was a program at that time that included job shadowing, or encouraging students to work in the community, now the transition program is much stronger. The role of the workplace mentor has been brought to the forefront in the program, and students actually go into

businesses or companies and follow executives and workers around on their jobs. These mentors may include teachers, business men and women, and other types of professions. "Our transition program is designed to assist students with learning disabilities to move from high school to college and work, depending on their choices," she said. "We feel that one of the strongest things that we do for them is include career awareness education into the students' instruction."

Table 1.

Best Practices for the Successful Transition of Joshua

Student	IEP	Skills Training	Vocational Training	Development Of Social Skills	Academic Support	Parents Involved	Community Support
	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Joshua	"I had a comprehensive IEP in place by the fifth grade."	"I was encouraged to participate in drama productions."	"Since the eighth grade, I knew I wanted to own my own hotel, and I took courses directed toward hospitality management."	"I was a representative to the *Governor's Council for Students with Learning Disabilities*."	"The teachers at my high school were extremely knowledgeable and conducted classes like college professors."	"My parents were involved in all meetings at school that were about college."	"I was offered a position, after being a representative on the Governor's Council, as a mentor for LD students in my community. "

+ Positive   - Negative

Table 2.

Best Practices for the Successful Transition of Arlan

Student	IEP	Skills Training	Vocational Training	Development Of Social Skills	Academic Support	Parents Involved	Community Support
Arlan	+ "I first had an IEP in the fifth grade, and it was updated until I was a senior in high school."	+ "I knew I wanted to be a psychologist and was encouraged to work in that field."	+ "My counselor helped me to choose courses that would help with my vocation."	+ "I became confident through having to advocate for my rights as an LD student."	+ "My high School was a college prep school, and the courses were harder than some college classes."	+ "My parents were involved in all of the meetings at school about college."	+ "I worked in the summers at a local mental health clinic for children."

Positive   - Negative

Table 3.

Best Practices for the Successful Transition of Amy

Student	IEP	Skills Training	Vocational Training	Development Of Social Skills	Academic Support	Parents Involved	Community Support
	+	+	+	-	+	+	+
Amy	"I first had an IEP in the ninth grade, but it did not include college."	"In the summers, I worked with elderly people and/or animals." Area."	"My counselor in high school encouraged me to take courses that were geared toward helping people."	"There were opportunities to become more social, but I was shy and did not like them."	"Academically, the work at my school was not challenging for me."	"My parents were involved in all of the meetings for college planning."	"In the summers, I worked at a retirement center in the community."

+ Positive   - Negative

Table 4.

Best Practices for the Successful Transition of Kara

Student	IEP	Skills Training	Vocational Training	Development Of Social Skills	Academic Support	Parents Involved	Community Support
	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Kara	"I had an IEP in my first year of high school." college."	"Being on the swim team taught me discipline."	"I always planned to teach grades K-12, and I planned for that."	"Being a member of the swim team taught me how to get along with others."	"I attended a summer program after high school to help prepare myself for college."	"My parents were always involved in all of the meetings at school about college."	"The community I lived in sponsored the swim meets for the school."

+ Positive - Negative

Table 5.

Best Practices for the Successful Transition of Lisa

Student	IEP	Skills Training	Vocational Training	Development Of Social Skills	Academic Support	Parents Involved	Community Support
Lisa	+ "I had an IEP in elementary school that did not include college."	+ "I was very good in English, and my teachers encouraged me to write."	+ "Since I wanted to be in the human services field, my counselor helped me choose courses that would teach me how to help people."	+ "I always had a lot of friends and belonged to clubs."	+ "I spent the summer after high school at a special summer school program that prepared me for going to college."	+ "My parents were required to come to school for all meetings for college planning."	- "I did not work in the community."

+ Positive - Negative

Table 6.

Best Practices for the Successful Transition of Stacey

Student	IEP	Skills Training	Vocational Training	Development Of Social Skills	Academic Support	Parents Involved	Community Support
Stacey	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
	"In the ninth grade, I received an IEP, and it was geared toward trade school."	"I am methodical, and I took classes related to that."	"After school and on weekends, I worked at a department store."	"I've have always had lots of friends."	"My father is a college professor, and my mother is a teacher, but I did not get the help I needed in special classes."	"My parents came to all the meetings at the school, including the ones about college."	"I worked in the community as a sales person at a local store."

+ Positive - Negative

Table 7.

Motivating Characteristics for Successful Transition of All Participants

Student	Self-Determination	Communication	Interpersonal skills
Joshua	"I always find a way to get where I want to be."	"I am comfortable communicating with people I know or don't know."	"I feel confident in most situations and make friends easily."
Arlan	"I want to be a psychologist; I know I can do it."	"I can comfortably communicate with anyone."	"I am an officer in the Psychology Club at college."
Amy	"I was determined to show everyone I could do college work."	I learned to communicate, as I learned to advocate for my rights."	"I feel comfortable talking to my teachers, friends, or a group."
Kara	"After being on the swim team, I know I can do anything I really want to do."	"Although I have some difficulty writing, I express myself well when I speak "	"I like joining groups and working as a team."
Lisa	"I do everything on time, and I do my best."	"I have a lot of confidence."	"I like to help people, and I have many friends."

Across Case Studies

In Case Study Number One, **Joshua** explained that his high school had a very good transition program and was known as an excellent college preparatory school. Joshua had a comprehensive, regularly updated IEP, and his particular skills of speaking, acting and interacting with others were cultivated. His vocational planning focused on the hospitality and hotel industry that would utilize all of those skills. His social skills were well developed through his position as a representative to the Governor's council and through his participation in drama activities. He had excellent academic support from his instructors who used teaching strategies comparable to those used by college professors.

He did not work in the community, although he did operate the A/V (audio/visual) equipment for all presentations in the auditorium of his high school. His parents were very involved in his college planning. Joshua feels he gained a strong academic foundation that empowered him to continue his education after high school, even though the college advisors at his school told him they did not think he should go.

Arlan, the participant in Case Study Number Two, had a transition team in high school that held within it all the best practices for successful transition to college. Unfortunately, the team, like Joshua's team, did not see a future in college for Arlan. The college counselors told her that she absolutely should not go to a four-year college. Every time she had a meeting with them, she became incensed and left her because she knew she was going to college, graduate school and doctoral school. The program was not geared to students with learning disabilities. Counselors told her parents that her GPA was not good enough for her to go to college. Arlan said she did get a good, solid academic base from the school, since it was touted to be a college preparatory school; it

lived up to its name in that respect. However, Arlan was forced to hire a private person to get her into a college that Arlan felt she would like.

Arlan's IEP was in place early, and it included vocational planning. These skills were further developed by her summer job at a child psychology clinic. This job came about through combining the resources of the school and community. Arlan has highly developed social skills. Her parents were involved in all aspects of the planning process for college.

Amy had a transition program that held all of the categories for promoting success in college. She had an IEP that included vocational training, and she worked in the community in a retirement home in the summers. Academic support was strong, although she says she was not challenged, as she should have been because of her known learning disabilities. Socially, Amy was not as outgoing as she would have liked to have been in high school, but the opportunities were there for her to cultivate her communicative skills if she had chosen to do so. She had difficulty, however, in overcoming her shyness and sometimes still does. Amy's parents were always included by the school in planning for college.

The swim team was instrumental in helping **Kara** to make a successful transition to college. The discipline it taught her, and the sense of accomplishment she felt from winning after long, hard training inspired her to know that she could do anything she wanted to do with hard work. This effort was a collaboration between the school and community, and it definitely developed Kara's talents and skills, including her social skills. She was encouraged and supported academically to pursue a career in education

as a teacher both in her IEP and in other areas at school. Her parents were always involved as well.

Lisa experienced all of the best practices of a good transition as set forth in this study, except for work in the community. She had an IEP and skills training through development of her English skills for which she received an award. She belonged to many clubs that helped her with social skills. She reported that her academic training was excellent, and her parents were involved in school meetings for college planning.

The only successful student who did not have the academic support she needed in high school was **Stacey**. This occurred because she was put into special education classes that were not managed well. The high school itself did have, according to Stacey, a strong academic program for regular students with no learning disabilities, and she feels that if she had been allowed to go into those classes, her transition would have been much easier. She chose to go to a summer program that helped her with that problem somewhat. Stacey did have an IEP and skills training through a work program in the community. Vocational training was more than she even wanted, as the counselors at the high school wanted her to go to work rather than college upon graduation. Stacey and her parents, who were included in the planning process, chose, however, for Stacey to go to college.

Several characteristics that were seen in all of the participants emerged as significant factors in their successes. All of them had strong self-determination, good communication skills, and excellent interpersonal relations. In the Transition Planning Inventory Student Form, (Cook & Patton, 1997) all participants scored highly in those

three areas. They know their strengths and weaknesses and were not shy in self-advocating for themselves. This means they are able to demonstrate ability and identify their own guiding values. They know how to prioritize important values from an array of values and practice reflective thinking in evaluating their strengths and limitations.

The transition practices in the college preparation programs at the high schools for the six students interviewed were all strong. From these case studies, it can be observed that the intended practices, or what have been related to be in use, favorably with the best practices set forth in the study. All students received IEPs at the required age. Skills were encouraged and training was given to every participant. Vocational planning (ITP) was included in the long- range plan for all students. Social skills were developed or available for development; in one case, the student did not avail herself of the opportunities. Academic support was good in all cases except for one; the student in that school was placed in special education classes that did not challenge her. All parents were included in every situation involving all six students, and all but one of the students was involved in a community work program or other community activity that worked in conjunction with the school. The successes of these students are impressive, as well as their transition programs. Were the high school transition programs responsible for the students' successes in college? They seemingly played a big part, as is readily admitted by the students (See Table 1.). However, other characteristics investigated were also predominant.

The self-determination, communication skills, and interpersonal relationships presented as important characteristics in the Student Transition Inventory did not vary that much in results between the students. All ranked themselves as high as possible in

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self-determination. In communications skills, they were average or good, with the reading and writing skills being the lowest scored traits in most instances. Interpersonal relations were all marked good or excellent by the students (See Table 2.).

What we do not know is how these stories will progress, or how they will end. Neither do we know how the transitions of these six students would have been if different transition practices had been used in their high schools. It is obvious, however, that these six students had a number of things in common. Above all, they had the desire and drive to go to college and a self-determination that took them there regardless of what anyone else recommended.

The repetitiveness of the studies is paramount to an understanding of the fluidity of the transitions for all of the students. The interconnectedness of the learning experiences of the students is amazing. The relationship between experiences, and best practices is significant and will be explored further in Chapter V.

Chapter V.

Conclusions

Summary

Even with a transition program in place, it can still be a negative experience for students with learning disabilities when there is no one in the program trained to work with LD students. This investigator would propose that all high schools implement transition qualified teams for students with learning disabilities. The members of the team should be trained in working with students with LD. The guidance needed for these students is different from that needed by other students. All participants in the transition process including teachers, administrators, parents, adult service providers, and students should be actively involved in the planning and implementation of a transition plan for students with learning disabilities who want to go to a post-secondary institution. Educators must take the lead in forming school transition teams for students with LD and assuring the inclusion of students and parents as full participants and leaders of the transition planning team.

The participants in this study demonstrated ability to actively participate in development of their Individualized Transition Plans (ITP) and Individualized Education Plans (IEP). They knew how they perceived themselves and how others perceived them. They were able to set realistic personal goals, and follow through with them.

Successful students are able to practice time management. They can draw conclusions on their own, and know when to increase the level of independence while performing tasks and goals. They also know when they are being taken advantage of by others and how to self-advocate to rectify those situations.

When expressing feelings and ideas to others, they demonstrate ability to differentiate among various levels of self-disclosure in conjunction with setting and degree of friendship (Cook & Patton, 1997). When they are uncomfortable, they know how to remove themselves from a situation. They also demonstrate ability to follow social conventions when expressing themselves. They know how to respond to situations appropriately with an intensity that is equivalent to the situation. And lastly, they have worked to cultivate the ability to use a variety of expressive formats for expressing feelings and/or ideas like letters, verbal and nonverbal communication, and artistic expressions (Clark & Patton, 1997).

They have needed speaking skills and demonstrate the ability to engage in conversational speech and may be the initiators of conversations. They know how to speak clearly and how to end conversations. They know how to identify nonverbal communication and construct a persuasive message for a specific cause. They have needed reading skills for acquiring information for written materials or may be seeking additional training from tutors to develop those skills more efficiently. In writing, they demonstrate the ability to write in a variety of styles, appropriate to the situation or purpose, or they are developing these skills.

Interpersonally, they demonstrate loyalty to family and friends and establish and maintain close and casual friendships in a variety of settings. They easily know how to modify social behavior in a variety of settings, and know how to evaluate environments for safety and potential danger. They know when to be sensitive and responsive to social cues in verbal communication (Cook & Patton, 1997). They get along well with co-workers, supervisors and others at school and work.

Even though they are all aware of their learning disabilities, they know they are capable of going to college and succeeding, sometimes in spite of authority figures trying to convince them that they are not. A common comment from several of the participants in this study was, "The more they told me I couldn't succeed in college, the more determined I was to show them that I could." It would seem apparent that it is time for educators to really listen to what students with learning disabilities have to say, instead of constantly telling them what traditionally is best for them.

It would also seem that those characteristics should be instilled or enhanced in all students planning to transition to college, whether they have learning disabilities or not. Further research should be done to find out how these students became so empowered by parents, themselves, or whoever inspired them. The transition practices in the college preparation programs at the high schools for the six students interviewed were all strong. From these case studies, it can be observed that the intended practices, or what have been related to be in use, favorably were the best practices set forth in this study. All students received IEPs at the required age. Skills were encouraged and training was given to every participant. Vocational planning (ITP) was included in the long-range plan for all students.

Social skills were developed or available for development; in one case, the student did not avail herself of the opportunities. Academic support was good in all cases except for one; the student in that school was placed in special education classes that did not challenge her. All parents were included in every situation involving all six students, and most students were involved in a community work program or other community activity that worked in conjunction with the school. The successes of these students are

impressive, as well as their transition programs. Were the high school transition programs responsible for the students' successes in college? They seemingly played a big part, as is readily admitted by the students (See Table 1.). However, other characteristics investigated were also predominant.

The self-determination, communication skills, and interpersonal relationships presented as important characteristics in the Student Transition Inventory did not vary that much in results between the students. All ranked themselves as high as possible in self-determination. In communications skills, they were average or good, with the reading and writing skills being the lowest scored traits in most instances. Interpersonal relations were all marked good or excellent by the students (See Table 2.).

As stated earlier, the influence of three terms in a support program for learning disabled students was not addressed. It is believed by this researcher that these students could succeed at any university, with or without a support program, but there is no evidence in this study to prove or disprove that hypothesis.

What we do not know is how these stories will progress, or how they will end. Neither do we know how the transitions of these six students would have been if different transition practices had been used in their high schools. It is obvious, however, that these six students had a number of things in common. Above all, they had the desire and drive to go to college and a self-determination that took them there regardless of what anyone else recommended.

Participation in post-secondary education is an important transition outcome, perhaps even more important than employment. Predictors of success that emerged in

this study have barely scratched the surface of this enormous challenge. A significant number of students with learning disabilities are not making the successful transition from secondary school to post-secondary education or even to successful adult living. There are high unemployment rates, and outcomes are often not better for those students who do make it to the post-secondary environment and struggle to adjust to academic and interpersonal demands of the college environment.

The problems exist because of the misconception that a learning disability is a "mild" disability that will disappear in adulthood. Research suggest that learning disabilities frequently have a significant negative impact on successful post-secondary educational and work outcomes (Cummings, Maddux, & Casey, 2000). To ensure more positive outcomes for students with learning disabilities, transition planning must begin in the elementary grades, be built on theory-based best practices, and focused on academic and counseling activities that teach vocational and social skills, self-awareness and self-advocacy.

Implications for Future Research

In addition to a need for case studies on transition programs for students with learning disabilities, there is a critical need for individual school and school districts to conduct follow-up studies on students who have left their programs (Collet-Klingenberg, 1998). The best test of how well programs work is the post-school outcomes of students with learning disabilities. That includes post-college.

Furthermore, additional research needs to be done in the area of personal characteristics of successful students with LD; interpersonal/social skills; team building related to transition IEPs; school and community teams; and similarities and differences

between adolescents with and adolescents without learning disabilities, as they move through secondary education and into post-secondary education. The evidence for having a transition program for the summer following high school graduation or the year following high school graduation is strong and should be investigated more in-depth. This investigator hopes that this study conducted on transition programs that assisted six students with learning disabilities to transition to post-secondary education could be one important step in building a foundation for many follow-up studies.

A comparison study of students within a support program for learning disabled students at a university and others, not in a support program, could prove to be enlightening for future research. Another note of interest was that four of the students interviewed came from the Midwest, Ohio and Illinois. This was not known by the investigator before the students participated in this study. Models of best practices in transition for LD students in Midwestern high schools, in general, might reveal that high schools in that particular part of the United States could have program components that would be of interest to the rest of the U.S. educational system.

Successful transition planning for post-secondary education students with learning disabilities involves multidimensional informal and formal assessment early in the student's educational career (Levinson, 1998). The assessment and transition planning process should be integrated within a K-12 career education/development program and guided as time goes on. The areas of academic achievement (particularly writing and English), self awareness, social skills, problem solving, self-advocacy, study skills and strategies should receive special attention. More research should be done on a transition planning development theory. More programs need to be studied and written about.

When enough have been have been evaluated, educators will begin to get a clear picture of which practices really are the best practices.

Suggestions for Future Policies for Best Practices

This investigator would suggest other improvements for best practice for transition for learning disabled students in high school preparing for college. In addition to the ones held forth in this study, it is strongly suggested, that personal therapy be required for all students in order to help them get to know their strengths and weaknesses.
An interim program of some nature should always be in place for the summer before the freshman year in college. The high school transition programs in the Midwestern states like Ohio and Illinois stand out as significant in the area of best practices, and other schools in the nation should be paying close attention to these models. More preparation is needed to help LD students take the college entrance exams. Students should be required to either work or participant in some major extra-curricular activity like drama or sports, in order to build confidence and knowledge of team work. Only counselors trained in working with LD students should be advising the LD students, and encouragement should be more prevalent for urging these students to pursue four-year degrees.

Appendix I.

Interview Questions

1. Explain why you feel you have made a successful transition to college?

2. Was it difficult or easy for you to adjust to being at college and explain why.

3. What things do you feel helped you in high school to more easily make this transition?

4. What things do you feel made it more difficult for you to make this transition?

5. What would you change about the programs that were in place in your high school?

6. What things do you feel your college did to help you make the transition?

7. Who were the most significant people who helped you make the transition, and what did they do?

8. At what age or grade level did you decide that you would go to college and why?

9. Were there things before high school that you think significantly influenced you to go to college and if so, what were they?

10. What differences do you see between yourself and some of your peers who were not able to successfully make a transition to college?

11. What were the programs and who were the people at your high school that helped you prepare for going to college?

12. Did you start planning early in high school for college and if so, how?

13. How were your parents involved in planning for you to go to college?

14. Tell me about the one specific individual at school who helped you plan for college the most.

15. Tell me about your Individualized Educational Program (IEP).

16. How did you choose the college you would attend?

17. Did you hire someone to help you plan and get into a college; and if so, how did you find that person and how did that person help you?

18. How were you prepared to know what to expect academically in college?

19. How were you prepared to cope socially at college?

20. If there was a team approach in your high school for helping you make a successful transition to college, tell me who the members of the team were and what did they do?

21. How did you receive your rights in high school for preparing for college?

22. If you could change the way you were or were not prepared for college in high school, would you do that?

23. Do you know other students who had different experiences in transitioning to college from yours? Compare them to yours.

24. Did anyone at your high school follow up with you after you got to college to see if you needed further help?

25. Were there programs at the college to help you with the transition?

26. If you could advise others on how to make a successful transition to college, would you say?

27. Are you satisfied with the transition you have made to college?

28. Did anyone encourage or teach you to advocate for your rights in college?

29. Is there anything you else would like to add?

Appendix II.

Questionnaire

The following questions were taken from three planning sections of the TPI

(Transition Planning Inventory Student Form), Form # 6810, developed by Gary Clark

and James Patton, PRO-ED, Inc., Austin, Texas. Answers were based on a scale of: 0

(Not Appropriate), 1 (Strongly Disagree) to **5 (Strongly Agree). DK (Don't Know)**

was at the end of the 0 –5 scale.

Self-Determination:

I know and accept my strengths and limitations

I express my feelings and ideas to others in the right way

I express my feeling and ideas to others with confidence

I set personal goals

I make personal decisions

Communications:

(Choose rating based on settings in which you will be.)

I have the speaking skills I need.

I have the listening skills I need.

I have the reading skills I need.

I have the writing skills I need.

Interpersonal relations:

I get along well with family and relatives.

I have the skills to be a parent.

I can make friends wherever I go.

I say and do the right thing wherever I am.

I can get along well with my boss on a job.

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