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The Facilitation of Students with Learning Disabilities to Postsecondary Education by Secondary Special Educators

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Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in [Special Education](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

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The Facilitation Of Students With Learning

Disabilities To Postsecondary Education

By Secondary Special Educators

(TITLE)

BY

Victoria A. Stephans

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

M.S. in Education

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1991

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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DEPARTMENT HEAD

*The Facilitation Of Students With Learning
Disabilities To Postsecondary Education
By Secondary Special Educators*

BY

Victoria A. Stephans

B.S., Eastern Illinois University, 1974

M.S., Eastern Illinois University, 1991

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

*Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters in Education at the
Graduate School of Eastern Illinois University*

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1991

Abstract

This descriptive research was conducted to collect data concerning the attitudes and policies about transition to postsecondary education by secondary special educators in the State of Illinois. A survey was sent to 208 secondary special educators representing the independent high school districts in the state. The survey measured three variables in relation to size of school: special educators' awareness of postsecondary educational opportunities, special educators' expectations for students labeled learning disabled to pursue postsecondary education, and current practices for serving high school students labeled learning disabled. The findings showed that there were more likenesses than differences in the transition attitudes and practices of secondary special educators in large and small schools in the State of Illinois. Out of sixteen items analyzed a priori, only one item showed a significant difference. That difference was that a higher percentage of special educators from large schools were aware of postsecondary programs for students labeled learning disabled. In only one out of three variables, level of awareness, was there a significant difference based upon school size. There is a need in future research to focus on establishing criteria as to what levels schools are functioning at on these variables, so that intervention and staff-training can more readily and profitably be developed.

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Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In the early 1980's, Dexter (1982) and Putnam (1984) reported that expanded educational services for students with learning disabilities had not yet reached the postsecondary level. According to Dexter (1982), few postsecondary institutions provided direct services for students with learning disabilities. Only a few specialized programs for this population were scattered throughout the United States. In the 1988 edition of Peterson's Guide to Colleges with Programs for Learning Disabled Students, over 900 4-year and 2-year colleges were listed that offer either comprehensive programs or special services for undergraduate students with learning disabilities. Current research reports that the incidence of learning disabilities among college freshman has increased tenfold since 1978 (McGuire, Norlander, & Shaw, 1990).

However, in a recent longitudinal transition study by Wagner (1989) it was reported that out of the 245 students with learning disabilities who exited secondary education in 1985-86, only 1.8% were enrolled in a 4-year college or university. Although the percentage of students with learning disabilities attending 4-year colleges or universities is increasing, it is still significantly lower than students

without learning disabilities (Beirne-Smith & Deck, 1989; McGuire, Norlander & Shaw, 1990; Putnam, 1984; Wagner, 1989).

There is little research, to date, that gives clear reasons why more students with learning disabilities are not taking advantage of the special programs and services in 4-year colleges and universities. Current research related to the topic of transition to postsecondary education can be divided into three categories:

1. Programs that are available (Dexter, 1982).
2. How to choose the best school/program (Cowen, 1985).
3. Variables related to students with learning disabilities participating, or not participating, in postsecondary education (McGuire, et al.).

The focus of this review of literature is the latter category, in an attempt to better understand why more students with learning disabilities are not going on to college. The relationship between the following three variables:

1. Current practice.
2. Teacher expectations.
3. Teacher awareness and the successful transition of students with learning disabilities to postsecondary education will be examined.

Review Of Related Literature

Current Practice

In an overview and critique of current practices with adolescents and young adults with learning disabilities, Johnston (1984) discussed the current educational programs available to service this population. He stated that at the secondary level there were several different approaches being used in high schools across the country, including the following options:

1. The basic skills remedial model.
2. The functional curriculum model.
3. The tutorial model.
4. The work study model.
5. The learning strategies model.

According to Johnston (1984), fifty-one percent of the schools responding to their questionnaire used the basic skills remedial model, which has as its objective the improvement of basic academic skill deficits by providing remedial instruction. The basic goal of the functional curriculum model is to prepare students to function in society by teaching basic skills that will enable students with learning disabilities to get along outside of school. In the tutorial model, schools provide instruction in the academic content areas, focusing on the specific material which needs to be mastered in the regular curriculum. In the work-study

model, the basic goal is to instruct students in job and career-related skills and give them on-the-job experience. The objective of the learning strategies model is to teach students how to learn rather than to teach them specific content. According to Johnston (1984), the learning strategies model was the most effective. He stated that with the rapid technological changes in today's society, the validity of teaching content, which might become nonsignificant in five years, is questionable.

According to Johnston (1984), each of these programs is an isolated option, but most schools use a combination of approaches. He stated that the determination of the most appropriate procedures is based upon the severity of the student's problem, the assessment of the student's most immediate and future needs, and the size of the school and facilities that are available.

In an article on learning disabilities resource room teachers and students, Haight (1985) stated that the solution of the dilemma of what to emphasize in both regular education and special education curricula appears to be developing within the concept of career education. She defined career education as a blending of academic and life-relevant information into a meaningful relationship. Discussing a 1979 survey of 98 secondary learning disabilities teachers by

Deshler, Lowrey, and Alley which listed the same five programming approaches cited in Johnston (1984), Haight (1985) stated that other studies have provided evidence of the diverse strategies being used by secondary level special education teachers (Gillet, 1978; Lerner, Evans & Meyers, 1977; Mayle & Riegel, 1979; McNutt & Heller, 1978; Touzel, 1978; Zigmond, 1978, as cited in Haight, 1985).

In her article, Haight (1985) described a Michigan model for career education used statewide. She found two problems with this model when applied to special education:

1. How does the teacher determine which goals have been acquired and which should be taught?
2. How would the teacher determine which goals were priority items?

She concluded her article by stating that perhaps the title of "learning specialist" would be more appropriate to describe the eclectic role of the resource room teacher, stating that it "accentuates the learning abilities of the teacher and the student to work cooperatively toward a successful, useful education" (Haight, 1985, p. 447).

In a study by Olson and Midgett (1984) the similarities and difference in characteristics of resource and self-contained programs was examined. According to Olson and Midgett (1984), it is supposed that the severity of the

learning problem determines which placement is selected. They stated that the resource class has been considered better equipped to meet the needs of students with mild learning disabilities while the special class is better for those with more severe problems. They also stated that there is a lack of empirical evidence of such differences and asserted that there may be a gap between the rhetoric and the reality.

The purpose of Olson and Midgett's (1984) study was to compare the intelligence, academic, process, affective, and demographic characteristics of the population identified as learning disabled staffed into these placements. They hypothesized that the students assigned to self-contained classrooms would score significantly lower in all these areas. Findings indicated little difference in the overall characteristics of the students in self-contained versus resource room placements. According to the authors, both groups had problems in academic and processing areas. In terms of differences, it was generally found that the students staffed into self-contained classes had lower IQ scores. The authors suggested further research to investigate the behavior differences more objectively.

According to Houck, Geller, and Engelhard (1988), the rapid expansion of secondary learning disability programs has left little time to document current practices. Their study

examined perceptions of 135 teachers of students with learning disabilities working in middle-junior high and high school programs regarding the following:

1. The presence of specific attributes often associated with successful programs.
2. Their professional views on field-related issues.
3. Suggestions for program improvement.

A survey instrument, consisting of 28 Likert-type items, 2 open-ended queries, and 7 requests for demographic information was used. Data was examined to determine if teachers' perceptions differed based on program type, level, or setting.

In reporting their findings the authors stated that it appears that the LD teachers sampled do not acknowledge the strong presence of many attributes associated with successful programs (Houck, et al., 1988). They considered the relatively low student participation in individual program planning and program evaluation at the secondary level striking. Differences of opinion were found for only two items, student participation in IEP planning and student participation in program evaluation. These differences were based on program type and instructional level and no differences were associated with school setting. Houck, et al. (1988) concluded that the overall results of their study indicated that although a number of attributes thought to be

influential in the success of secondary LD programs are present, such as: ongoing assessment and effective communication with parents, some are more characteristic than others and many are not evidenced to the extent that may be desired.

In an article on connecting links between secondary and postsecondary programs for persons with learning disabilities, Mick (1985) examined program models currently being implemented for the delivery of services in higher education and suggested an emphasis in which links are built between secondary and postsecondary programs. She indicated that models of services at the college level have not been implemented long enough to supply longitudinal data concerning their effectiveness and stated that some of the models are merely transplants from secondary programs. For the purpose of her article she discussed the following six relatively distinct models:

- 1. The tutorial model*
- 2. The compensatory strategies model*
- 3. The Adelphi model*
- 4. The HELD model*
- 5. Linking or bridging model*
- 6. Special university courses*

In the tutorial model tutors are assigned to students to provide support and skills necessary to attain minimal competencies. According to Mick (1985), most college programs provide some tutoring service for students labeled as learning disabled.

The model most frequently used in elementary and secondary education is the compensatory strategies model. According to Mick (1985), this model provides one or more of the following support services: permission to tape lectures, extended course time, taking examinations by means other than the written word, using calculators or computers, or taking reduced class loads. These services are also used on the college level.

Mick (1985) stated that the primary objective of the Adelphi model is the development of independent living skills. Citing the research regarding the interpersonal problems many students with learning disabilities experience throughout adulthood, this program includes a comprehensive admission and identification process and a 5-week summer diagnostic session. The students are enrolled in a study skills course and take one to three summer credits as preparation for the fall. The unique component of this model is the one hour of individual and one hour of group counseling required each week.

According to Mick (1985), Project HELD has three objectives:

1. To develop a program of academic support services that complements and uses already existing services on campus.
2. To raise the level of awareness of professors and to increase their knowledge about learning disabilities.
3. To design and develop materials for professors to use in their courses that include specific accommodations appropriate for students with learning disabilities.

In the linking or bridging model, students, during the last two years of secondary education, sample different courses and activities offered at a nearby university or college to develop aptitudes and attitudes leading to a successful postsecondary experience (Mick, 1985). This model was designed to introduce students to the college environment and help them develop skills needed for success. In contrast to the compensatory strategies model, the special course model emphasizes the development of special courses, with a course content substantially the same as found in regular classes, but designed for smaller student enrollment, extended course time, and more individualized instruction. It was the opinion

of the author that of the six models reviewed, the little-used linking or bridging model exhibited the most potential for providing transitional concepts between secondary and postsecondary school programs.

In an article on challenges for the future of postsecondary education for students with learning disabilities, McGuire, Norlander, and Shaw (1990) considered two issues at the secondary level detrimental to successful transition of students with learning disabilities to postsecondary education. These issues were: (a) underpreparedness and (b) definition and overall identification.

According to McGuire, et al. (1990), some students with learning disabilities do not meet postsecondary requirements for admission even though they have the potential for college-level studies. They attributed this to "tracking," which allows limited flexibility in course selection and may unwittingly be limiting postsecondary options. In terms of definition and over-identification, McGuire et al. (1990) suggested that both the availability and the quality of services provided for students with diagnosed learning disabilities may be compromised or denied due to the inclusion of slow learners, underachievers, and other low achievers in special education programs on the secondary level.

In a comparative study of college freshmen with and without learning disabilities, Dalke (1988) also expressed concern over the practice of "tracking." He compared the performance of 36 college freshmen labeled learning disabled to 36 freshmen who were not labeled using Parts I, II, and III of the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Test Battery. The results showed that the students labeled learning disabled scored significantly lower on all the 17 clusters with the exception of the scholastic and nonscholastic interest inventories. Dalke (1988) stated that,

It is unprofessional, if not cruel, to relegate students with learning disabilities to a less rigorous academic high school curriculum while at the same time encouraging them to pursue college (p. 569).

Due to the marginal vocational success students with learning disabilities are experiencing, special educators are paying increased attention to their students' occupational preparation, and new program models and roles are emerging (Okolo, 1988). Many of these models have stressed collaborative and cooperative service delivery between regular and vocational education (Okolo & Sitlington, 1986; Sitlington, 1982, as cited in Okolo, 1988). Okolo (1988) cited figures showing that during the 1976-77 school year, 20% of secondary students served in special education were

enrolled in a vocational program or course. She compared those figures with the 1982-83 school year, in which 40% of secondary students serviced in special education participated in vocational education programs or courses, with 64% mainstreamed in regular vocational education classrooms and labs. It was Okolo's (1988) opinion that secondary school LD teachers must be knowledgeable about the characteristics of vocational education programs and the instructional and behavioral demands they place on students in order to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by these programs.

In a study comparing the instructional approaches used in secondary vocational and nonvocational classrooms, Weber and Puleo (1988), described two conflicting views regarding secondary vocational education's role and potential for meeting students' needs. Citing several educators, the authors stated that vocational education provides only a tenuous link to job opportunities, with no advantages over those afforded a general education curriculum. According to this view, vocational education provides training for "low-paying, dead-end jobs that require little, if any formal education" (Weber & Puleo, 1988, p. 49), while neglecting training for high-tech growth occupations. The authors were concerned that the skills involved in vocational education were outdated or outmoded and did not reflect current business

and manufacturing practices. Because of its association with students identified as "low-track", the activities and skills in vocational education are less challenging, stimulating, effective, and are at a lower level of cognitive processes than those in "high-track" classes.

As a contrast, Weber and Puleo (1988) also presented the views of advocates of vocational education. These advocates contended that vocational education is a powerful, positive motivator for students, addressing the needs of many students at-risk, including the disadvantaged, potential dropouts, and the handicapped. According to this view, vocational education incorporates specific strategies for identifying job-related changes, updates training to incorporate those changes, and teaches problem solving and other high-order analytical skills. It also gives students the opportunity to acquire basic work habits and values, career decision making skills, and job-search skills which are needed to secure and retain a job. It was the authors' conclusion that vocational classes offer alternative approaches to instruction which may benefit certain subgroups of students.

The Postsecondary Education Planning Project is a collaborative project between eight Illinois high schools and their local community college, Triton College. The purpose of this project is to help high school students plan for their

futures, in particular, their college education. All of the high schools participating in the program utilize a district-wide postsecondary plan form and a parent-college planning guide (Burdick, 1991). They also use a counselor resource manual containing samples of first and second semester course plans, college and career planning tips, and list of local staff and services.

According to Burdick (1990), there are six benefits of participating in the project:

1. Data profiles of each year's graduating senior class.
2. Identification of students who are at-risk.
3. Utilization of postsecondary service center.
4. Encouraging thirteenth year educational planning.
5. Establishment of a backup plan.
6. Family involvement in postsecondary planning.

The author concluded that while a single educational institution can positively influence the transition process, a partnership between several institutions enhances the opportunities. Such is the case of the Postsecondary Education Planning Project, which provides a pool of resources, consisting of staff and services, and multiple opportunities for students to utilize them (Burdick, 1990).

In an article on the issues and future needs of preparing students with learning disabilities for postsecondary education, Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler, and McGuire (in press) discussed several programming options. According to these authors, secondary service delivery models should encourage independence, with instructional and counseling services helping students to become more self-sufficient, independent thinkers. They suggested, as an alternative to the traditional resource room, that learning strategies be taught with a curriculum incorporating study skills. This, they stated, has the goal of promoting independence and responsible learning. The authors concluded by stating that,

Secondary programs should be enhanced to go beyond just getting students through high school to a level of nurturing the independence necessary for transition to postsecondary education and adult life (Shaw, et al., in press).

Teacher Expectations

Current practice has been shown to effect the expectations of teachers. In an article on the role of beliefs in the practice of teaching, Nespor (1987) stated that it is now an accepted premise that the ways teachers think and understand are vital components of their practice. While many

argue the importance of people's beliefs in influencing how they conceptualize tasks and learn from experience, the author stated that little research has been done on the structures and functions of teachers' beliefs about their roles, their students, the subject matter areas they teach, and the schools they work in. One of the purposes of this article was to suggest several key functions of beliefs in teachers' thinking.

In describing the uses of beliefs, Nespor (1987) stated that belief systems are very important in determining how individuals organize the world into task environments and define tasks and problems. The author considered task definition important in understanding teaching and teacher education. She suggested that to understand teaching from teachers' perspectives, the beliefs with which they define their work must be known and understood. As a facilitation of memory processes, beliefs involve moods, feelings, emotions and subjective evaluations (Nespor, 1987). According to the author, the ways events and elements in memory are indexed and retrieved can be influenced by the affective and emotional components of beliefs.

In describing the functions of beliefs, Nespor (1987) argued that a major role in the definition of teaching tasks and organization of the knowledge and information relevant to

those tasks is played by teachers' beliefs. She suggested that the contexts and environments that teachers work in are ill-defined, and that beliefs are used to make sense of these contexts. The author concluded by stating that more attention must be paid to the goals teachers pursue and to their subjective interpretations of classroom processes.

According to Reid (1987), when children are met with positive attitudes by their teachers, peers, and parents, they thrive academically and socially. Reid (1987) stated that the opposite is also true. Negative attitudes, hostility and rejection are devastating to children and cause them to discredit or reject themselves. In her chapter on the attitudes toward students with learning disabilities, in school and at home, Reid (1987) stated that students with learning disabilities suffer as a consequence of negative attitudes. She suggested that a change of attitudes toward these children needs to be made and that they need to be taught how to protect themselves.

Reid (1987) described a negative pattern of teacher attitudes toward students with learning disabilities, stating that stereotypes of students labeled learning disabled are negative. According to the author, these students are perceived as having many more academic and personality problems than students not labeled. She stated that teachers

behave differently, in a negative way, towards students with learning disabilities, and stated that teachers not only responded less frequently to these students, but also spent less time with them. The author concluded by suggesting that problems be developed to assist students with learning disabilities cope with the threat of negative attitudes.

In a study by Siperstein and Goding (1985), the differential behavior by teachers toward isolated/rejected students labeled learning disabled and popular students who were not labeled was investigated. Not only was the differential behavior defined by the observation of behavior between the teachers and the target students, an intervention strategy was designed to make teachers aware of their behaviors. The results of the study indicated that before the awareness program, teachers had more interactions, responded with a greater frequency of corrections, and used more verbal and nonverbal negative behaviors with students labeled learning disabled than students not labeled. It was also reported that the quantity of teachers' interactions remained essentially the same after the awareness program, but that the amount of negative interactions was significantly reduced. The authors concluded that, in order to create a more positive social climate for students labeled learning disabled who are low in social status, direct intervention with specific behaviors rather than general attitudes is more important.

In a chapter on teachers' expectations and student motivation, Brophy (1985) stated that the expectations a teacher has toward a student are likely to affect that student's motivation. If teachers expect students to find academic tasks meaningful and worthwhile, they are more likely to do so. On the other hand, if teachers expect them to view these tasks as pointless drudgery, they probably will. He cited a study by Brophy, Rohrkemper, Rashid, and Goldberger (1983, as cited in Brophy, 1985) conducted to see if communicated teacher expectations about academic tasks and how students would perform on those tasks would influence the students' actual responses. While results were mixed, Brophy (1985) stated that student task engagement was lowest on tasks that the teacher preceded by a negative introductory statement. It was noted by the author that no such parallel tendency for positive task introductions was reported. In fact, the highest student engagement rates were observed on tasks that teachers moved directly into without making any introductory statement (Brophy, 1985).

According to Cooper (1983), in the late 1960's, a great interest arose in self fulfilling prophecies. According to the author, educators were interested in whether teacher beliefs about student future achievement could influence how students eventually performed. In discussing teaching

behaviors related to expectations for student performance, Cooper suggested four behavioral categories producing reliable associations with teacher expectations:

1. It appears that teachers create warmer socioemotional environments for students they have high expectations for.
2. Evidence indicates that teachers' verbal inputs to students depends on performance expectations.
3. Teachers give more clues, more repetition, and more rephrasing to students they have high expectations of.
4. Students a teacher has high expectations of are praised more than students a teacher has low expectations of.

Foster, Schmidt, and Sabatino (1976) investigated the teacher expectancies created by the term "learning disabled." In this study 22 elementary grade teachers, divided into two groups, were shown a videotape of various activities of a fourth grade boy who was not labeled. One group was told that the boy did not have an exceptionality, the other group was told that he was learning disabled. After viewing the videotape, both groups filled out referral forms based upon their viewing the tape. The group that believed the boy was learning disabled rated him more negatively than did the group

that believed he did not have an exceptionality. The authors concluded that labeling a student "learning disabled" generates negative expectations in teachers and can affect their observations of behavior. They suggested the adoption of a system of remediation not based on categories of disability but according to the needs of each student.

Gillung and Rucker (1977) investigated whether or not teachers have lower expectations for students labelled handicapped than students with identical behaviors who are not labeled. The results of the study indicated that:

1. Urban regular education teachers had lower expectations for students who were labeled than suburban regular education teachers.
2. Regular education teachers had lower expectations for students who were labeled than students with identical behaviors who were not labeled.
3. Special educators had lower expectations for students who were labeled than students with identical behaviors who were not labeled.

The authors considered it a major finding of this study that labels carry a negative connotation which results in both regular and special education teachers having lower expectations for students who are labeled. Gillung and Rucker (1977) concluded by stating that educators need to be aware of

these negative effects and use great caution when deciding whether or not to label students.

In a study similar to Gillung and Rucker's (1977), Foley (1979) investigated the effect of labeling and teacher behavior on children's attitudes. The subjects were 78 fourth graders from a rural school that had an integrated special-education program. The students were shown one of two videotapes of a child engaging in various kinds of academic and social behavior. On One tape the teacher's reactions to the child's behavior was positive, while on the other tape it was negative. The subjects were told that the child on the tape was labeled normal, mentally retarded, or learning disabled. By random selection, the subjects were assigned to either the positive or negative teacher condition and to one of the three labeling conditions. According to Foley (1979), the results demonstrated that the reactions of a teacher to a child's behavior has significant effects on their peers' acceptance of the child. He reported that across all of the labeling conditions, the subjects rated the child higher when he was reacted to positively by the teacher. Contrary to previous research that reported students labeled as mentally retarded as being rejected by peers not labeled, Foley (1979) reported that the label "mentally retarded" rated significantly higher peer-acceptance than did the labels "learning-disabled" or "normal".

Teacher Awareness

Current practice is not only effected by teacher expectation, but it is also effected by teacher awareness of postsecondary programs. In an article on career education, Rau, Spooner, and Finian (1989) described a study conducted in North Carolina in 1983. The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent career education skills were being taught to students with handicaps. In this study, 1,826 special education teachers and administrators were surveyed. In reporting their findings, the authors stated that the actual level of use of career education knowledge was consistently rated to be significantly lower than the respondents deemed necessary within their schools. Rau, et al. (1989) also cited disparity between administrator and teacher responses. According to their findings, teachers perceived their schools' career education programs to be at a higher level than administrators, and felt a greater need for additional emphasis than did the administrators. Of note, according to Rau, et al. (1989), was the fact that teachers stated that their knowledge about career education was not predominantly acquired by either inservice workshops or college courses. The authors did not state how the knowledge was acquired.

In an article on postsecondary programs for students with learning disabilities, Beirne-Smith and Deck (1989) surveyed 4-year colleges and universities identified as offering special programs for postsecondary students with learning disabilities. This survey determined the types of services provided and related results to students served, assessment and referral procedures used, academic and nonacademic services offered, and procedures employed for staff training. According to the authors, the results from the survey indicated that students seem willing to seek assistance, as self-referral was the most frequently reported method of referral. They also stated that parent/guardian referrals were also a frequent source of referral, while fewer referrals were reported from admission procedures.

In an article on transitioning to postsecondary programs, Getzel (1990) described the transition planning process developed by the Chesterfield County, Virginia, schools. The Student Transitional Educational Program, or STEP, has three major components: students assessment, programming, and transition. In this program, transition teams begin collecting information about postsecondary programs to determine what support services are available and what type of instruction is offered for students with special

needs (Getzel, 1990). Getzel (1990) also listed five areas that should be explored before student transition takes place:

1. Admissions policies
2. Assistance in registration
3. Financial assistance
4. Academic support
5. Availability of other support services

After reviewing the current literature on the three variables chosen for this study: (a) current practice, (b) teacher expectation, and (c) teacher awareness, the importance of each variable both singly, and combined can be seen. If current practice in a school includes "tracking" students with learning disabilities into vocational programs rather than college preparatory programs, these students are underprepared for college admission and/or for academic expectations (McGuire, et al., 1990, Dalke, 1988). The research on teacher expectations is clear. If teachers believe their students with learning disabilities don't have the ability to "go on" to postsecondary education, and that belief is communicated, their students will believe it also (Reid, 1984; Brophy, 1985; and Gillung and Rucker, 1977). The lack of current research on teacher awareness of college programs for students with learning disabilities suggests that this is an area where research is much needed. Therefore, the purpose of this study

was to attempt to better understand why more students with learning disabilities are not going on to college.

Statement of Hypothesis

Current research has shown that the number of postsecondary institutions providing direct services for students with learning disabilities is increasing (Burdick, 1990; Dalke, 1988; Mick, 1985; Johnston, 1984). Although this number is increasing, the proportion of students with learning disabilities attending postsecondary education is significantly lower than students without learning disabilities (Beirne-Smith & Deck, 1989; McGuire, et al., 1990; Putnam, 1984; Wagner, 1989). To what extent do current practice, teacher expectations, and teacher awareness of postsecondary programs influence the transition of students with learning disabilities to postsecondary education? To answer these questions, a survey was sent to secondary special educators in the State of Illinois. This descriptive data concerning transition attitudes and practices tested the null hypothesis that there was no difference in the facilitation to postsecondary education of high school students with learning disabilities in Illinois by secondary special educators based on size of school district. Four separate research questions were asked. Research question one was asked a priori, while questions two, three, and four were asked post hoc:

1. Will there be any differences in the survey item responses of special educators who are serving high school students with learning disabilities based on the size of the school district?
2. Will there be a relationship between the level of awareness of postsecondary educational opportunities in special educators and the size of the school district as measured by items, 8, 9, 10, and 11?
3. Will there be a relationship between the expectations of special educators for high school students labeled learning disabled and the size of the school district as measured by items, 13, 14, 15, and 16?
4. Will there be a relationship between the current practice of serving high school students labeled learning disabled and the size of the school district as measured by items 5, 6, 7, and 12?

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study consisted of 208 high school special educators from the State of Illinois. According to data from the Illinois State Board of Education (1991) there are 104 independent high school districts (Type 1) in the

state. These are districts that do not include elementary schools. Two surveys were sent to each of these schools.

Instrument

A survey instrument (See Appendix A) was developed to collect information regarding state-wide secondary special educator's attitudes, opinions, and beliefs about postsecondary transition. Items one through four asked for demographic data (type of classroom setting, number of years of teaching). Special educators' level of awareness of postsecondary educational opportunities was identified by items 8, 9, 10, and 11. Special educators' expectations for students labeled learning disabled to pursue postsecondary education was identified in items 13, 14, 15, and 16. Special educators described their current practice of serving high school students labeled learning disabled in items 5, 6, 7, and 12.

Design

A survey was chosen for the design of this study to gather this descriptive information from Illinois secondary special educators. This design was chosen in order to collect information relevant to current attitudes and practices about transition to postsecondary education in the State of Illinois (Borg & Gall, 1989).

Data Analysis

Two types of data analysis were used on the data collected from the survey. A Chi-square analysis was used to answer the question asked a priori, which was question number one: Will there be any differences in the survey item responses of special educators who are serving high school students with learning disabilities based on the size of the school district? The Chi-square analysis allowed the researcher to determine whether or not a significant difference existed between the observed number of cases that fell into the categories of large school and small school, and the expected number of cases, based on the null hypothesis (Runyon & Haber, 1984).

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to answer the three post hoc research questions which are as follows: Will there be a relationship between the level of awareness of postsecondary educational opportunities in special educators and the size of the school district? Will there be a relationship between the expectations of special educators for high school students labeled learning disabled and the size of the school district? Will there be a relationship between current practice of serving high school students labeled learning disabled and the size of the school district?

According to Runyon and Haber (1984), Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient can be employed with interval- or ratio-scaled variables and represents the extent to which the same individuals occupy the same relative position on two variables. These data analyses yielded information on the relationship between school size and each of the following groups of variables: level of awareness, expectations, and current practice.

Procedures

A survey instrument was developed and field tested. After field testing, the surveys were sent to the secondary special educators accompanied by a cover letter which explained the purpose of the survey and offered a summary of the findings. A stamped, self-addressed envelope was included to help encourage prompt response. Due to the rate of return, there was no follow-up activity.

Findings

Out of the 208 high school special educators who received a survey, 96 return them, for a response rate of 46%. The rate of response from large schools (more than 917 students) was 44%, while small schools (less than 917 students) responded at a rate of 56%. This data is representative of large and small schools, not necessarily geographical area.

In answer to research question number 1, the only survey item which showed a significant response difference ($p < .047$) between large and small schools was item number 8, which was stated as follows: Are you aware of college programs, both locally and state-wide, for students with learning disabilities? The difference was that a higher percentage of special educators from large schools were aware of postsecondary programs for their students labeled learning disabled. Ninety percent of the respondents from large schools stated that they were aware of postsecondary programs while only seventy-four percent of the respondents from small schools stated that they were aware of postsecondary programs.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient used to determine the results of the three post hoc research questions found only one significant difference. This significant difference ($p < .025$) occurred in special educators' level of awareness of postsecondary educational opportunities. In neither research question number 3 (expectations) nor 4 (current practice) were significant levels of difference found.

Discussion

The findings of this study showed that there were more likenesses than differences in the transition attitudes and practices of secondary special educators in large and small

schools in the State of Illinois. Out of sixteen items analyzed a priori, only one item showed a significant difference. That difference was that a higher percentage of special educators from large schools were aware of postsecondary programs for their students labeled learning disabled. The post hoc analysis showed that in only one out of three variables, level of awareness, was there a significant difference based upon school size. This finding was in keeping with the results of the a priori analysis. In essence, while the null hypothesis according to the findings was rejected, the differences were not of a major magnitude. While they were significantly different statistically, they were not significantly different practically.

One limitation of these findings is that, while the findings show that there was a significant difference in the level of awareness of postsecondary programs between secondary special educators in large and small schools, the findings do not show whether the level of awareness is high or low. In other words, the data shows that as the size of school increases, the level of awareness increases, but it doesn't show what the level of awareness is.

During this research, legislation was passed which the researcher believes may have affected the results of this study. With the passage of Public Act 86-1218 in Illinois and

the federal P.L. 101-476, transition planning and services are now state and federally mandated (Stephans, 1991). No school, regardless of its size, can choose whether or not to provide transition services for its students. Because of this a great deal of interest has been aroused about this topic, and workshops have taken place throughout the state. It is the researcher's belief that these mandates have most certainly affected the area of current practice, and have, in a practical sense, affected level of awareness of postsecondary programs and teacher expectations.

In considering recommendations for the future, it would be profitable to know more than just whether or not large and small schools are on the same level in each of the three variables studied: level of awareness of postsecondary educational opportunities, teacher expectations, and current practice. Further research is recommended to discover what the present levels of these three variables are. Criteria need to be established and data collected in order to ascertain these levels. If further research finds that secondary special educators in Illinois rate low in a particular variable, using the established criteria, intervention and staff-training can more readily and profitably be developed.

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For office
use only

(1-4)

Computer #

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS SURVEY IF YOU ARE A HIGH SCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATOR WHO DELIVERS SERVICES TO STUDENTS LABELED LEARNING DISABLED. IF YOU DO NOT FIT THIS DESCRIPTION SIMPLY RETURN THE SURVEY UNCOMPLETED. THANK YOU.

Circle the appropriate number to indicate your response. Return the completed survey in the self-addressed stamped envelope. Thank you for your assistance. _____

1. Which word best describes your classroom setting?
Resource service
(student spends less than 50% of time in special education services)..... 1 (5)
Instructional program (self-contained) in regular school
(student spends 50% or more of time in special education services)..... 2
Combination of resource and instructional program..... 3

2. Indicate the number of years you have served students labeled learning disordered. (Include this year as one.)
1..... 1
2-5..... 2 (6)
6-10..... 3
More than 10..... 4

3. Indicate the size of your school based on the average daily attendance
More than 917 students..... 1 (7)
Less than 917 students..... 2

4. What is your best estimate of the percentage of students in your program who are identified as learning disabled that plan to pursue postsecondary education?
0%..... 1
1-3%..... 2 (8)
4-5%..... 3
More than 5%..... 4

5. When a student identified as learning disabled enters your program, is he/she questioned about plans for postsecondary education?
YES..... 1 (9)
NO..... 2

6. Does your school have a transition counselor who deals specifically with students identified as learning disabled who want to pursue postsecondary education?
YES..... 1 (10)
NO..... 2

7. Do you deal with the transition of students identified as learning disabled, whether they plan to pursue postsecondary education or enter the work force?
YES..... 1 (11)
NO..... 2

8. Are you aware of college programs, both locally and state-wide, for students with learning disabilities?
 YES..... 1 (12)
 NO..... 2
9. Are you aware of local college programs for students with learning disabilities, but not familiar with state-wide programs?
 YES..... 1 (13)
 NO..... 2
10. Are you content with your level of knowledge about college programs for students with learning disabilities?
 YES..... 1 (14)
 NO..... 2
11. Would you like to be better informed about college programs for students with learning disabilities?
 AGREE..... 1 (15)
 DISAGREE..... 2
12. Does the career education curriculum in your school address the needs of students identified as learning disabled who plan to pursue postsecondary education?
 AGREE..... 1 (16)
 DISAGREE..... 2
13. Is it important to encourage students with learning disabilities to consider postsecondary education?
 AGREE..... 1 (17)
 DISAGREE..... 2
14. Is it important to encourage students with learning disabilities to pursue postsecondary education only after they have expressed an interest in doing so?
 AGREE..... 1 (18)
 DISAGREE..... 2
15. Is it more important to encourage students with learning disabilities to participate in vocational education than pursue postsecondary education?
 AGREE..... 1 (19)
 DISAGREE..... 2
16. Is it important to encourage only some students with learning disabilities to pursue postsecondary education, based upon their achievement in the classroom?
 AGREE..... 1 (20)
 DISAGREE..... 2

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY. PLEASE RETURN IT IN THE PROVIDED ENVELOPE.